LITERARY CRITICISM: A SHORT HISTORY

Romantic Criticism

William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks

LITERARY CRITICISM

ROUTLEDGE

LITERARY CRITICISM:
A SHORT HISTORY

Volume 3

ROMANTIC CRITICISM

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CHAPTER 16

POETIC DICTION: WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE

§ *"poetic diction" as a critical problem—II. sketch of English poetic diction: the Spenserian strain, the neo-classic: Latinism, adjectives, periphrase, high and low style (Addison, Pope, Johnson), rise of the concept "poetic diction," Dryden to Gray—III. the classical protest (Horace, Jonson, Dryden, Pope, Goldsmith, Swift), the romantic protest (more radical), the anonymous poetic style circa 1797, the diction of the* Lyrical Ballads, *Wordsworth's argument in the* Advertisement *and* Preface: *"very language of men," "low and rustic persons," "men in a state of vivid sensation"—IV. Coleridge's critique: distinction between words and manner of combining words, between hackneyed image and nonsense, relation of learning to poetry, Wordsworth's ventriloquism —V. history of poetic diction since Wordsworth: Taylor in 1834, Pre-Raphaelite diction, 20th-century imagistic, realistic, and metaphysical reactions, significance of the debate between Wordsworth and Coleridge—VI. antecedents of Wordsworth's primitivism: continental ideas, Homeric theories, the noble savage, Ossian and other forgeries, Duck and other worker poets, Byron's ridicule, the reaction to aristocratic neo-classicism (Swift, Johnson, Goethe, the "bourgeois standard"), varieties of primitivism since Wordsworth: Tolstoy's peasant norm, Saxonism theoretical and practical, concept of false primitives, Celticism, folk speech and argots—VII. who invents good new words?—VIII. poetic diction and the language of poetry, intrusion of the chronological norm, social and commercial requirement of originality (T. S. Eliot, Gertrude*

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Stein), the "Cliché Expert," Gourmont, ingenious and original clichés, Gene Fowler's Barrymore, *H. W. Fowler on misapplied quotations—IX. "old saws with new teeth,"* New Yorker *sophistication vs. schoolboy style, tradition and usage, Milton to Pope, Dante to Gray, Wordsworth and 18th-century nature poetry, Blake and Elizabethanism* §

AT A LATER POINT IN THIS NARRATIVE (CHAPTER 29) WE SHALL HAVE occasion to consider the question how far a close verbal analysis of poetry may fall short of doing justice to the more massive structural features of such works as novels, epics, dramas. Literary criticism of the mid-20th century in America has been raising that question with an insistence which might even be taken at this point as a discouragement to our dignifying the episode of 18th-century "poetic diction" and the Wordsworthian condemnation of it with very much notice. Both "poetic diction" and the reaction against it, however, stand out conspicuously in critical history, and we choose to dwell upon them with some deliberation. The concept of "poetic diction" is at least a handy one both for the theorist and for the literary historian. It has at least the advantage that it reduces to a nearly definable and testable form a good many other problems of literary criticism. "Poetic diction" is a good small-scale model of the larger problems.

II

THE issue of poetic diction had been growing upon the English literary consciousness steadily since about the time of Chaucer, that is, since the beginning of Renaissance English literature, and with special intensity since the time of Spenser. A new linguistic consciousness, the new linguistic expansiveness of the Renaissance nation, promoted the learned enrichment of vernacular expression and produced a plethora of words.[1] A somewhat different, but closely related, spirit of self-conscious artistry promoted a specifically poetic diction. Such a diction grew rapidly with the tradition of an important poetry in an important language and the development and refinement of this poetry through several generations of poets and critics.

Precisely what kinds of poetic diction were invented and handed on by the succession of English poets and translators—by Spenser, Fair-

[1] Cf. F. W. Bateson, *English Poetry and the English Language* (Oxford, 1934).

fax, Sylvester, Sandys, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Thomson, Collins, Gray? This is a complicated question. One may distinguish minor and major strains. Some kinds of poetic diction (like the Petrarchan flowers that flourished in the lesser Elizabethan sonneteers and were twined with graceful levity by Spenser and Sidney, or the rustic dialect words of Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender*) did not continue into the neo-classic era. Others grew stronger and were consolidated in the English tradition continuously up to Wordsworth's time. Without making a long excursion into what is a matter rather of directly poetic than of critical history, the historian of poetic theory may well note some of the main kinds of poetic diction which became fixed in the 18th-century complex. Slightly to one side perhaps belongs the archaic, melancholy, and variously romantic strain invented by Spenser for the *Faerie Queene*[2] and lavishly repeated in the 18th-century Spenserian imitations. A more distinctly classical diction can be described under three main grammatical headings: (1) With regard to etymology, the most pronounced trend was the continuation of Renaissance Latinism, especially as this was helped by the rise of scientific or "philosophic" ideas and vocabulary and by Ovidian and Virgilian meanings in the translations of Dryden and his predecessors. (2) With regard to parts of speech, the most pronounced trend was the increase of adjectives, both Latin derivatives and a large crowd of scientific and poetic coinages bearing the English termination -y.[3] The growth of empirical observation during all this period had an understandably inflationary effect upon descriptive language. (3) With regard to syntax and logical relation, the most pronounced trend was the coupling of the adjective with the noun in a kind of glossy stock phrase, or periphrase, which was sometimes epithetical and redundant, in the Homeric style, sometimes more abstractly definitional (by genera and properties) in a way that is nowadays said to have reflected a philosophy and science of orderly classes in a stable cosmos.[4]

[2] Cf. Ernest De Selincourt, ed. *The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser* (Oxford, 1932), Introduction, pp. lxi–lxii; F. M. Padelford, "Aspects of Spenser's Vocabulary," *PQ*, XX (July, 1941), 279–83; E. E. Stoll, *Poets and Playwrights* (Minneapolis, 1930), p. 193.

[3] George Gordon, *Shakespeare's English*, S. P. E. Tract No. 39 (Oxford, 1928), p. 274; John Arthos, *The Language of Natural Description in Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (Ann Arbor, 1949), Appendix C.

[4] Cf. Geoffrey Tillotson, *Essays in Criticism and Research* (Cambridge, 1942), p. 84, on "Physico-theological nomenclature"; John Arthos, *The Language of Natural Description*, Chapters IV and V. Other correlatives of 18th-century poetic diction may perhaps be named. The closure and symmetry of couplet verse, for instance, may often have demanded the trochaic or dactyllic adjective. Cf. Thomas Quayle, *Poetic Diction* (London, 1924), Chapter II, p. 29, quoting Shenstone's *Essays*. Personification, as found in the poetry of Johnson, Collins, or Gray, is a kind of abstraction which may be viewed as a special type of poetic diction. Cf. Bertrand H. Bronson, "Personification Reconsidered," *ELH*, XIV (September, 1947), 163–177; Earl R. Wasserman, "The Inherent Values of Eighteenth-Century Personification," *PMLA*, LXV (June, 1950), 435–63.

The definitional type of periphrase stood in a fairly close relation to the standard of universality and abstraction which we have discussed in our last chapter. And the taste for the universal entailed, as we have suggested, a certain mistrust of particularity, the imputation to this of lowness, meanness, or vulgarity. The classical high, middle, and low styles which we have seen transferred by late classical theory from oratory to poetry (becoming the epic, georgic, and eclogue styles) [5] appear by the mid-18th century to have been simplified into the polar concepts of the lofty and the low. Thus Addison could be guilty of saying:

> Since it often happens that the most obvious Phrases, and those which are used in ordinary Conversation, become too familiar to the Ear, and contract a kind of Meanness by passing through the Mouths of the Vulgar, a Poet should take particular Care to guard himself against Idiomatick Ways of Speaking.
>
> —*Spectator* No. 285

And Pope:

> It must also be allowed that there is a majesty and harmony in the Greek language, which greatly contribute to elevate and support the narration. But I must also observe, that this is an advantage grown upon the language since Homer's time: for things are removed from vulgarity by being out of use; and if the words we could find in any present language were equally sonorous or musical in themselves, they would still appear less poetical and uncommon than those of a dead one, from this only circumstance, of being in every man's mouth.[6]

And Samuel Johnson, in a *Rambler* passage on Shakespeare, erected one of the most notorious monuments to the lofty taste.

> Words become low by the occasions to which they are applied, or the general character of them who use them. . . .
>
> Come, thick night!
> And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
> That my keen knife see not the wound it makes;
> Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
> To cry, Hold, hold!
>
> . . . the efficacy of this invocation is destroyed by the insertion of an epithet now seldom heard but in the stable, and *dun* night may come or go without any other notice than contempt. . . .

[5] See *ante* Chapter 6, p. 103; Chapter 8, p. 146.

[6] Postscript to Pope's translation of the *Odyssey*. Cf. James Sutherland, *A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry* (Oxford, 1948), p. 85.

> [the] sentiment is weakened by the name of an instrument used by butchers and cooks in the meanest employments. . . . Who, without some relaxation of his gravity, can hear of the avengers of guilt *peeping through a blanket?—Rambler* No. 168

The following positive defense of a special poetic diction is provided by Gray.

> The language of the age is never the language of poetry; except among the French, whose verse, where the thought and image does not support it, differs in nothing from prose. Our poetry, on the contrary, has a language peculiar to itself, to which almost everyone that has written has added something by enriching it with foreign idioms and derivations: nay, sometimes words of their own composition or invention. Shakespeare and Milton have been great creators this way; and no one more licentious than Pope or Dryden, who perpetually borrow expressions from the former.[7]

The precise terms "diction" and "poetic diction" seem to have arisen somewhat earlier, in the high Augustan era. Dryden uses "diction" with an apology for Latinism, in the preface to *Sylvae*, 1685. The first person to use the term "poetic diction" is apparently Dennis, in his *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry* (ch. V), 1701. In his Preface to the *Iliad*, 1715, Pope wrote: "We acknowledge him [Homer] the father of poetical diction."[8] As with so many other classic themes, Samuel Johnson wrote a retrospective last word.

> There was . . . before the time of Dryden no poetical diction. . . . Those happy combinations of words which distinguished poetry from prose had been rarely attempted; we had few elegancies or flowers of speech.[9]

III

Two kinds of protest against poetic diction have occurred: that of the classicist, hostile to pedantry and affectation, appealing to polite idiom, the educated spoken word; and that of the romantic, hostile to the same things, but appealing to the primitive, the naive, the directly passionate, the natural spoken word. The first of these protests occurs intermittently

[7] To Richard West, April 4, 1742, *Letters*, ed. Leonard Whibley, I, 98. Cf. Lord Chesterfield's recommendation of "poetic diction" to his son seven years old (*Letters*, October 26, 1739).

[8] Thomas Quayle, *Poetic Diction*, p. 7; F. W. Bateson, *English Poetry and the English Language*, p. 71.

[9] *Life of Dryden*, *Lives* (ed. G. B. Hill), I, 420.

throughout the classical and Renaissance eras. It is the voice of Horace (*usus quem penes arbitrium est et jus et norma loquendi*), of Ben Jonson ("Pure and neat Language I love, yet plaine and customary"),[1] of Dryden in his preface to *Annus Mirabilis* ("'Tis not the jerk or sting of an epigram . . . nor the jingle of a more poor paronomasia"), of Pope in his *Essay:*

> False eloquence, like the prismatic glass,
> Its gaudy colours spreads on ev'ry place;
> The face of Nature we no more survey,
> All glares alike, without distinction gay.
> II, 311–314

It is the latter-day voice of Goldsmith, in his *Life of Parnell*,[2] complaining about the "pristine barbarity" of contemporary Spenserians and Miltonists.

The classical protest is more or less unremitting, but it is at the same time moderate, good-tempered, hardly revolutionary. The same Goldsmith who accuses the archaizers of "vainly imagining that the more their writings are unlike prose the more they resemble poetry" will write an essay entitled "Poetry Distinguished from Other Writing." "Certain words" are "particularly adapted to the poetical expression." Jonathan Swift was a consistent classical champion of good prose sense and the idiomatic norm, but the following passage from his satiric *Apollo's Edict*, 1721, illustrates the ambiguity of the classic stand:

> Your tragick Heroes shall not rant,
> Nor Shepherds use *poetick* Cant:
> Simplicity alone can grace,
> The Manners of the rural Race.

Perhaps Swift avails himself of an ironic intimation in that closing periphrase. The "shepherds" become the "rural race" in the course of sixteen syllables saying that they have no right to such a title. Or does Swift accept a certain amount of poetic diction without noticing it? The question evaporates out of the poem itself into the obscure region of Swift's conscious or unconscious intentions.

The final and successful revolt against classical "poetic diction" was more violent—a protest of the second type, primitive, naive, "vegetally"

[1] *Timber* No. 118.

[2] *The Miscellaneous Works of Oliver Goldsmith* (London: Globe Edition, 1919), p. 483. "These misguided innovators have not been content with restoring antiquated words and phrases, but have indulged themselves in the most licentious transpositions and the harshest constructions, vainly imagining that the more their writings are unlike prose, the more they resemble poetry."

And see Samuel Butler, *Hudibras*, Part II, Canto I, ll. 591–632.

radical,[3] the first of its kind, at least in English literature, and a thing distinctive of a new social and philosophic era. It is worth while remembering that in the statements which we are about to quote, Wordsworth was reacting immediately not so much against Spenser, Milton, and Pope,[4] the poets who had created English poetic diction, as against his own now anonymous contemporaries who wrote the mélange of dictions which was then poetic staple. The following from the *Monthly Magazine*, for February, 1797, specializes in periphrastic elegance.

> For thee the fields their flowery carpet spread,
> And smiling Ocean smooths his wavy bed;
> A purer glow the kindling poles display,
> Robed in bright effluence of ethereal day,
> When through her portals bursts the gaudy spring,
> And genial Zephyr waves his balmy wing.
> First the gay songsters of the feather'd train
> Feel thy keen arrows thrill in every vein.

From the same issue of the *Monthly* comes this example of the ameliorated pensiveness which had descended in the tradition of Milton's minor poems:

> Oh, far removed from my retreat
> Be Av'rice and Ambition's feet!
> Give me, unconscious of their power,
> To taste the peaceful, social hour.
> Give me, beneath the branching vine,
> The woodbine sweet, or eglantine,
> When evening sheds its balmy dews,
> To court the chaste, inspiring muse.[5]

Beside these let us set down some short examples of the verse which Wordsworth ventured to print in the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798 and which he defended in his *Advertisement* and in his *Preface* to later editions.[6]

[3] Kenneth Burke, "The Vegetal Radicalism of Theodore Roethke," *Sewanee Review*, LVIII (Winter, 1950), 76, argues that all movements toward a new style are movements toward the "infantile," a way of re-expressing the basic things.

[4] "To this day I believe I could repeat, with a little previous rummaging of my memory, several thousand lines of Pope" (*Letters of the Wordsworth Family*, ed. W. Knight, Boston, 1907, III, 122). The statement is part of a comment made by Wordsworth, in 1836 or later, on Hazlitt's *Spirit of the Age* and recorded in the manuscript *Memoirs* of Barron Field.

[5] Both examples are quoted in Marjorie L. Barstow, *Wordsworth's Theory of Poetic Diction* (New Haven, 1917), pp. 62–3.

[6] The texts of 1800, 1802, 1805 may be conveniently consulted in *Wordsworth, Representative Poems*, ed. Arthur Beatty (New York, 1937), pp. 676–704.

"How many are you then," said I,
"If they two are in Heaven?"
The little Maiden did reply,
"O Master! we are seven."

Few months of life has he in store
As he to you will tell,
For still, the more he works, the more
His poor old ancles swell.
My gentle reader, I perceive
How patiently you've waited,
And I'm afraid that you expect
Some tale will be related.

I heard a thousand blended notes,
While in a grove I sate reclined,
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to the mind.

And Susan's growing worse and worse,
And Betty's in a sad *quandary*
And then there's nobody to say
If she must go, or she must stay:
—She's in a sad *quandary*

In his *Advertisement* of 1798 Wordsworth called these poems experimental, and he said they were "written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure." He feared his readers would think he had been "too low" and "too familiar," but he contrasted with his own style "the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers." [7] In his *Preface* some of the statements are even more downright. He is proud of having uttered "little of what is usually called poetic diction." His purpose has been "to imitate, and, as far as possible, to adopt the very language of men." [8] He asserts "that there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition." [9] His objection to poetic diction is that it is not true to nature—either to external nature or to human nature in

[7] Coleridge, *Biographia*, Chapter I, speaks of the "glare and glitter of a perpetual yet broken and heterogeneous imagery . . . an amphibious something."

[8] Cf. his later note to *Simon Lee the Old Huntsman:* "The expression when the hounds were out, 'I dearly love their voice,' was word for word from his own lips."

[9] The phrasing is that of 1802, a slight alteration from that of 1800.

its responses to the external. "I have at all times endeavored to look steadily at my subject; consequently, I hope that there is in these poems little falsehood of description, and that my ideas are expressed in language fitted to their respective importance." He seems to believe too that even honest expressions can become bad poetry just by being repeated. "I have . . . abstained from the use of many expressions, in themselves proper and beautiful, but which have been foolishly repeated by bad poets, 'till such feelings of disgust are connected with them, as it is scarcely possible by any art of association to overpower." On the genetic side the *Preface* contains a strong statement of the reasons why the language of "low [1] and rustic" persons is likely to be poetic:

> . . . because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived; and because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the influence of social vanity, they convey their feelings and notions in simple unelaborated expressions. Accordingly, such language, arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by poets.

Yet this *Preface* contains a few statements which look like attempts to qualify Wordsworth's main view concerning the "very language of men," the language of "low and rustic" persons. For he speaks also about "a selection of the real language of men in a state of *vivid sensation*," about "a certain *colouring of imagination*, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an *unusual way*." [2] He wishes to make ordinary situations "interesting" by tracing in them the laws of human nature "as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a *state of excitement*." "All good poetry," as every reader of the *Preface* will remember, "is the spontaneous overflow of *powerful feelings*." [3]

[1] "Low" becomes "humble" in 1832.

[2] 1802.

[3] The italics in these quotations are ours. In the same year, 1800, Wordsworth's letter to the critic John Wilson develops his theory as follows: "Please whom? or what? I answer, human nature as it has been and ever will be. But, where are we to find the best measure of this? I answer, from within; by stripping our own hearts naked, and by looking out of ourselves towards men who lead the simplest lives, and most according to nature; men who have never known false refinements." But he says also: "It is not enough for me as a Poet, to delineate merely such feelings as all men *do* sympathize with; but it is also highly desirable to add to these others, such as all men *may* sympathize with, and such as there is reason to believe they would be better and more moral beings if they did sympathize with." Wordsworth's argument is aimed against the distaste felt by Wilson and his friends for *The Idiot Boy*.

IV

THE simplism and primitivism of Wordsworth's poems, and even more of his theoretical views, provoked a considerable volume of immediate protest from his reading public. But the critic who spoke with the shrewdest authority was Coleridge, after a lapse of seventeen years, in his reminiscential *Biographia Literaria.* Coleridge's argument about poetic diction may be summarized under three main heads.

(1) He said that if Wordsworth, in arguing that the language of "metrical composition" is essentially the same as that of prose, meant only that poetry and prose have the same vocabulary, or dictionary, on which to draw, he was uttering a truism. Coleridge concluded that Wordsworth really meant that the poetic manner of combining words was no different from that of prose. And this, he retorted, was patently false.[4] (It is perhaps worth observing that Wordsworth may not in fact have made it quite clear whether he excluded either of the meanings defined by Coleridge—and that it is not necessary, either for justice to Wordsworth, or for the purposes of literary history, to suppose that he had brought himself to the point of facing a sharp distinction.)

(2) Coleridge argued that if a given image or figure (for instance, the "image" of Phoebus as the sun) is used badly by a given poet (for instance, Gray in a sonnet criticized by Wordsworth), the reason for the badness is not that the figure is a repetition of what other poets have done, but that it is in some way a violation of "grammar, logic, psychology," "good sense," or "taste"—the "*rules* of the IMAGINATION."[5]

> . . . it is a bad line, not because the language is distinct from that of prose; but because it conveys incongruous images, because it confounds the cause and effect, the real *thing* with the personified *representative* of the thing; in short, because it differs with the language of GOOD SENSE! That the "Phoebus" is hackneyed and a school-boy image, is an *accidental* fault, dependent on the age in which the author wrote.—II, 58

Another poet might be found, for instance Spenser, who had used the Phoebus image well.[6]

[4] Cf. Thomas M. Raysor, "Coleridge's Criticism of Wordsworth," *PMLA*, LIV (June, 1939), 496–510.

[5] Chapter XVIII, (*Biographia*, ed. J. Shawcross, II, 64–5).

[6] Coleridge's master at Christ's Hospital, the Reverend James Bowyer, had been in the habit of saying that "in the truly great poets . . . there was a reason assignable, not only for every word, but for the position of every word" (Chapter I; I, 4).

(3) Coleridge argued that education, and not the lack of it, tends to make a poet. Uneducated men are disorderly in their writing; they lack "surview." If the peasantry of Wordsworth's Westmoreland and Cumberland spoke a pure and vigorous language, this came not from uninstructed communion with nature, but from a spirit of independence and from a solid religious education and acquaintance with the Bible and hymnbook.

One kind of speech (socially defined) could not be more *real* than another.[7] But in a given instance it might be either more or less poetic. In his appreciation of Wordsworth's own poetic performance, Coleridge noted that Wordsworth suffered the difficulties of a ventriloquist in his undue liking for the dramatic form. Either a rustic speaker was invested with a Wordsworthian authority of utterance, or an opposite fault appeared, matter-of-factness, circumstantiality, and a downright prosaism.[8] "I've measured it from side to side; 'Tis three feet long, and two feet wide." It is not possible for a poet, urged Coleridge, especially not for a lyric poet, "to imitate truly a dull and garrulous discourser, without repeating the effects of dullness and garrulity." [9]

V

THE episode of the *Lyrical Ballads* was of course far from settling the business of poetic diction in English. Before many years had passed, a reviewer of Wordsworth's poems would raise his voice to accuse even Wordsworth of having fostered his own kind of poetic diction, more dangerous than the old, because more "covert and surreptitious," more "insidious." A new set of "stock words" seemed to this reviewer to be sprinkled through the "fugitive" poetry of the day "with a sort of feeling senselessness"—words, for instance, like *wild, bright, dark, lonely, light, dream.* The principle of their use was sentimental association lending color to a "pretext of conveying sense"—"in a manner which Mr. Wordsworth's prefaces will be found to explain." [1]

A recent historian of English poetic language has noted the progressive "deliquescence" of diction in English poetry (the development of a

[7] Chapter XVII (II, 39).

[8] Chapter XXII (II, 101, 109).

[9] Chapter XVII (II, 36). Cf. Letter to Southey, July 29, 1802 (*Letters*, ed. E. H. Coleridge, I, 386): "Here and there a daring humbleness of language and versification, and a strict adherence to matter of fact, even to prolixity. . . ."

[1] [Sir Henry Taylor], "Wordsworth's *Poetical Works*," *Quarterly Review*, LII (1834) 318–19. Cf. Theodore Spencer, "Antaeus, or Poetic Language and the Actual World," *ELH*, X (September, 1943), 182–3. Taylor means that Wordsworth's defense of his own diction offers the rationale of a new poetic diction. A close parallel appears between Taylor's argument and Wordsworth's own indictment of earlier poetic diction. See especially the Appendix to the *Lyrical Ballads*. 1802.

certain moonlight norm) during the Tennysonian and Pre-Raphaelite era.[2] In our own century we have experienced several waves of reaction to that era, the imagism of Pound, the realism of Masefield, the metaphysical inclusiveness of Eliot. Nothing is likely to seem more axiomatic to the student of poetry today than statements to the effect that "The poetry of a people takes its life from the people's speech and in turn gives life to it,"[3] that "the language which is good enough for labor and love and marriage, for birth and death, and the friendly breaking of bread, is good enough . . . for the making of poetry."[4]

Nevertheless, the debate between Wordsworth and Coleridge was a significant event in English literary history. It is part of the first romantic revolt against poetic diction in English and it is a more or less adequate monument to two questions: one genetic—Among what kinds of people does poetic language originate? The other critical—How is "poetic diction" in the sense of something undesirably artificial to be distinguished from the valid language—the idiom—of poetry?

VI

THE primitivism of Wordsworth was something which had numerous relations with his immediate background, though some of these are only vaguely implicit. Vico was a fountainhead of which he was certainly unaware. It is not necessary to inquire how directly he was in touch with Herder and other continental writers on the theme of *Volkspoesie*, or with theories of the bardic composition of Homer's epics in English writers like Blackwell, Kames, and Blair.[5] More concrete phenomena are the archaic forgeries of the 18th century (the Ossianic epics of Macpherson, the Rowleyan balladry of Chatterton), the cult of the "noble savage," the "child of nature," and the pathetically exploited worker poets—Stephen Duck the thresher, Henry Jones the Irish bricklayer patronized by Lord Chesterfield, James Woodhouse the shoemaker, Anne Yearsley the milkmaid (Lactilla) who developed airs and fell out with Hannah More.[6] The vogue was recorded in the ridicule of Byron.

[2] F. W. Bateson, *English Poetry and the English Language* (Oxford, 1934) pp. 108–15.

[3] T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1933), p. 5.

[4] Harriet Monroe, quoted in Marguerite Wilkinson, *New Voices* (New York, 1931), p. 113.

[5] Cf. Wellek, *Rise*, p. 87; and Wellek's review of Vico's *Autobiography*, *PQ*, XXIV (1945), 166–8. Wordsworth's acquaintance with the Abbé Delille and other French georgic poets of the 18th century, shown in his early poems *An Evening's Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*, is discussed by Arthur Beatty in his *Wordsworth, Representative Poems* (New York, 1937), pp. 31–3, 673.

[6] C. B. Tinker, *Nature's Simple Plan* (Princeton, 1922), pp. 92–103. One difference between Wordsworth and his forerunners of the 18th century was that with

When some brisk youth, the tenant of a stall,
Employs his pen less pointed than his awl,
Leaves his snug shop, forsakes his store of shoes,
St. Crispin quits, and cobbles for the muse,
Heavens! how the vulgar stare! how crowds applaud!
How ladies read, and literati laud!
. . . .
Let poesy go forth, pervade the whole,
Alike the rustic, and mechanic soul!
Ye tuneful cobblers! still your notes prolong,
Compose at once a slipper and a song.[7]

Wordsworth's primitivism was part of a general reaction, setting in well before his own day, against the aristocratic side of neo-classicism. We have seen that Dryden believed the right language of poetry—the very model of correct poetry—to be the language of the king and court. Pope believed the same, at least of the Elizabethan age.[8] About George II he had much difficulty.[9] Swift [1] and Johnson were severe upon the imbecilities of society talk. Johnson spoke of "female phrases," "fashionable barbarisms." [2] It was possible, perhaps usual, during all this time, for the anti-aristocratic tendency to rest short of sheer primitivism in what Marxist criticism would later call the bourgeois standard. Thus Goethe, giving explicit utterance to an idea that was no doubt often implicitly entertained: "A middle rank is much more favorable to talent [than a noble rank], so we find all great artists and poets in the middle classes." [3]

The period from Wordsworth to the present day has been notable for the variety and complexity of its archaizing and primitivistic trends. Some of these, like the peasant standard arrived at by Tolstoy, have had no direct relation to the language. Others, like the theoretical Saxonizing of English essayists and scholars (Macaulay, for instance, and Furnivall), or the practical Saxonizing of the Homeric translator Francis Newman,[4] are quite obviously in the area of "poetic diction." We encounter now, in

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the latter the preference for nature did not reach the crisis of diction. That was what Wordsworth had against them. The supposedly primitive or natural poets of the 18th century were not distinguished for a Wordsworthian simplicity of language. They used all the ornaments. The point was precisely that they were able to do this. That apparently was thought to reveal something about origins, about natural inspiration.

[7] *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, ll. 765 ff.

[8] See his *Preface* to Shakespeare.

[9] See his *Epistle to Augustus.*

[1] See his *Tatler* No. 230.

[2] *Idler* No. 77.

[3] *Conversations*, February 24, 1825. Cf. Wordsworth's phrase "language of conversation in the middle or lower classes of society."

[4] Cf. *post* Chapter 20, p. 443.

contrast to the 18th-century beginnings, a primitivism rather formidably equipped with archeological and philological apparatus. A later special development has been a certain esoteric removal of the primitive locus. This means admitting the existence of fake primitives or bourgeois poseurs (like Robert Burns or Longfellow) but at the same time asserting the existence of a genuine peasant wisdom, an oral tradition from the foundations of the world. This was once in rapport with aristocratic and learned wisdom (the hut with the castle and the cloister) but has now been split off by the wedge of bourgeois culture and is withering away. Theorizing of this kind has had a Celtic and visionary orientation.[5]

So far as any view of poetic origins prevails very explicitly today, it is still likely to be the primitivistic. Our large literature in the departments of dialect, folk speech, argot and slang, is one testimony to a settled primitivistic interest among scholars. And this interest sometimes raises curious problems concerning not only compilation but evaluation. To select one instance from the many: a writer in the magazine *American Speech* argues that during World War II there were two kinds of soldier slang—a small number of terms really invented by soldiers and truly expressive (*shack up*, *sweat out*, *latrine rumour*, *chew ass*), and a much larger number of fake terms invented by newspaper writers, USO workers, and entertainers (*armoured cow*, for canned milk, *scandal sheet*, for payroll, *misery pipe*, for bugle, *homing device*, for furlough, *handgrenades*, for hamburgers, *tire patches*, for pancakes). In the same way there are two kinds of jazz slang—the genuine expressions of jazz musicians and fans (*Tailgate*, *solid*, *jam*, *riff*, *gutbucket*, *barrelhouse*), and the spurious inventions of publicity agents, masters of ceremonies, and popular music magazines (*God box*, for organ, *skin-beater*, for drummer, *syringe*, for trombone, *sliver sucker*, for clarinetist, *doghouse*, for bass fiddle, *gitter* or *git box*, for guitar).

> In each case the terms especially invented by persons not familiar through experience with the daily life of soldiers or musicians bear the mark of their artificial origins. They seldom

[5] See W. B. Yeats, "What is Popular Poetry?" in *Ideas of Good and Evil* (London, 1903), pp. 1–15. The classic philological discussion is that concerning the origin of the medieval vernacular lyric, Troubadour and Minnesang poetry. Did its origins lie in courtly scholarship or in folk minstrelsy? See Leo Spitzer, "The Mozarabic Lyric and Theodor Frings' Theories," *Comparative Literature*, IV (Winter, 1952), 1–4, 17–22. "Where within primitive lyricism should we then place the narrative-lyrical love songs of women inferred from the *jarchas* (= *refrains*)? Obviously in that pre-Christian framework of collective, improvised dancing songs of women in springtime which G. Paris, followed therein by Frings, recognized to be at the base of all lyrics in the Romance and Germanic vernaculars." "We are brought ultimately to visualize a primitive world of women dancing and chanting stanzas of love provided for them by the poets (a *Glückslaut* or *Klage* "im Munde des Mädchens, aber von einem Mann, dem Dichter, hineingelegt"), who thus achieve a vicarious pleasure. . . . Such a collaboration of the two sexes is no *creatio ex nihilo*. . . ."

> serve a denotive purpose, are laborious, and lack the expressive quality of the terms that have been born of the life experience of the participants themselves.

At the same time, however, this writer notes that jazz musicians and fans tend to discard their own vocabulary when it is taken over by commercial users.[6] In this kind of inquiry, which is inferred from which? The quality of the term from its origin, or the origin from the quality?

VII

THE question about the origins of poetic language seems to allude to a language upon which some sort of special poetic virtue has been conferred before it reaches the poet himself. We are forced to conceive poetic language as a kind of pre-poetically potent vocabulary or vigorous mode of expression. At the same time the history of poetic diction strongly suggests that the main inventors of poetic diction have been professional poets themselves—Spenser, Milton, Dryden, Pope. Who does make up the good new words and phrases—those that add something to our expressive stock and are fitted to survive? Do these occur first in works of creative literature, or in miscellaneous non-literary places?[7] Did the primitive bard write the best poetic language? And if he did, was he an unusually primitive, or an unusually advanced, member of his tribe? Is a modern poet an unusually advanced, or an unusually primitive, member of modern society?

If a dramatic clause be invoked—that is, if we observe that the language of any social class is proper when a writer is representing that class—the inquiry may appear to be translated into something quite different. And indeed it is true that the supposed speaker of any poem is always dramatic, and is always to be conceived as some kind of person, and often as a person not learned or poetically skillful. Nevertheless—as we have heard Coleridge remark about the experiments of Wordsworth—a direct imitation of the uncouth speaker does run a special risk of lapsing into realistic disorder and insignificance. This may be much like what a modern critic has called the "fallacy of imitative form," or like what Dryden called "mechanic humour" in the correctly low-life

[6] Morroe Berger, "Some Excesses of Slang Compilers," *American Speech*, XXI (October, 1946), 196–8.

[7] Cf. Max J. Herzberg, "Who Makes Up the New Words?" *Word Study*, XXIV (October, 1948), 1–9. The modern professionals quoted by Mr. Herzberg make very modest claims as linguistic innovators. As any new expression which becomes a part of the language has to appear in print in order to be recorded, it seems at least likely that a professional phase occurs early in the life of each neologism. But do professional journalists make up their own new words or overhear them in oral discourse?

imitations of Ben Jonson. It is possible also to have correctly tedious imitations of high life. Johnson and Swift were right about this. Anybody who has ever tried to collect brilliant or pungent expressions either at cocktail parties or at diners along truck routes must have been struck by the prevalence of the brassier kind of clichés and the reiterated simplisms of blasphemy.

VIII

IN THE end the only question of critical significance is the second of the two which we have framed above: How is poetic diction in the sense of something false and undesirable to be distinguished from the valid language of poetry? Yet it may not be easy to isolate this critical question. In addition to the concept of origins as we have just attempted to describe it, there is yet another, an intermediate kind of concept, that of chronological staleness, the hackneyed, which is usually associated with that of poetic diction and tends greatly to obscure the critical discussion of the latter. The theoretical issue of poetic diction seemed to Wordsworth an issue between artifice and nature.[8] To Coleridge it seemed more like an issue between propriety and impropriety, congruity and incongruity. In effect he applied the classic norm of decorum. Both Wordsworth and Coleridge assigned a relatively slight role to the chronological concept of the "hackneyed." Yet the notion of the hackneyed, the stereotype, the cliché, today enjoys a strongly established place in habits of critical thinking. It is likely to be among the first appeals of a theorist called upon to explain why poetic diction is undesirable.

The most obvious sense in which the poet is bound to bear the burden of originality is that which relates originality to the social and commercial conditions of success in literature. There is no practical point in repeating the classics, or in repeating their style. Even if some classic had failed to get written on schedule (in its own era) and even if it could be written instead today, the expectancies and demands of publishers and readers preclude the success of the performance. The undergraduate joker who types out a selection of the less well-known sonnets of Shakespeare and submits them over his own name to a New York press does so in full expectation of being rejected.[9] This massive and immovable fact about markets and readers is one of the grounds which supports a kind of statement that often proceeds with great authority from the successful literary person. Thus T. S. Eliot:

> It is exactly as wasteful for a poet to do what has been done already, as for a biologist to rediscover Mendel's discoveries. The French poets in question have made "discoveries" in verse

[8] Cf. Meyer Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (New York, 1953), p. 120.
[9] Cf. David Daiches, *A Study of Literature* (Ithaca, 1948), pp. 127–8.

> of which we cannot afford to be ignorant, discoveries which are not merely a concern for French syntax. To remain with Wordsworth is equivalent to ignoring the whole of science subsequent to Erasmus Darwin.[1]

And Gertrude Stein:

> The whole business of writing is the question of living in that contemporariness. Each generation has to live in that. . . . what I am trying to make you understand is that every contemporary writer has to find out what is the inner time-sense of his contemporaries. The writer, or painter, or what-not, feels this thing more vibrantly, and he has a passionate need of putting it down; and that is what creativeness does.[2]

But the critical problem of poetic diction and the cliché requires a somewhat more precise handling than that. One of the minor comic figures of our time is the "Cliché Expert," who in an early appearance was made to "take the stand" and testified along these lines.

> Q—Mr. Arbuthnot, you are an expert in the use of the cliché, are you not?
> A—Yes sir, I am a certified public cliché expert.
> Q—Would you answer a few questions on the use of the cliché in ordinary speech and writing?
> A—I should be only too glad to.
> Q—Thank you. Now just for the record—you live in New York?
> A—I like to visit New York but I wouldn't live there if you gave me the place.
> Q—Then where do you live?
> A—Any old place where I hang my hat is home sweet home to me.
> Q—What is your age?
> A—I am fat, fair, and forty.
> Q—And your occupation?
> A—Well, after burning the midnight oil at an institution of higher learning, I was for a time a tiller of the soil. Then I went down to the sea in ships. I have been a guardian of the law, a poet at heart, a prominent clubman and a man about town, an eminent—[3]

[1] 1918. Quoted by N. H. Pearson and W. R. Benét, *The Oxford Anthology of American Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1939), p. 1636.

[2] Gertrude Stein, "How Writing is Written," a talk before the students at Choate School in 1935 (cf. *The Choate Literary Magazine*, XXI, ii, 5–14), in N. H. Pearson and W. R. Benét, *The Oxford Anthology of American Literature*, pp. 1446–51.

[3] Frank Sullivan, "The Cliché Expert Takes the Stand," *The New Yorker*, August 31, 1935, pp. 15–16.

Here is an ironic frame of reference which makes a series of sorry expressions amusing. But what makes each of the expressions in itself so sorry? Not merely the fact that it is a cold potato, a stereotype (any word in the dictionary enjoys the same status), but the further fact that the expression has a certain special character, even if tame and drab. It attempts to stand up and make a little joke, and the joke is out of place. When the cliché expert took the stand, the context was all against him. There could hardly be any chance for his embroideries, even for the plainest of them. "Fat, fair, and forty" is not an answer for the witness stand.

"In the true notion of the *cliché*," says a French critic, "incoherence has its place by the side of triteness." [4] The logic of the situation would suggest that even ingenuity and originality are no sure proofs against the cliché. The highly ingenious periphrases often employed at certain levels of journalism have a cold ring, like echoes, even though we cannot say of what. A popular biography of a famous actor, for instance, yields a reviewer the following grounds of patronizing complaint.

> For Mr. Fowler, Broadway is inevitably "this street of fickle luster," a distiller a "maker of spirituous delicacies," and Shakespeare "Stratford's first gentleman;" cigarette-smoking is "bronchial debauchery," hair on the chest "torsorial upholstery," and the men's washroom "ammoniac grottos" equipped with "cracked and homely porcelains." When he wants to convey the idea that some white mice were multiplying rapidly, he says that the "snowy rodents were fruitful;" and when Barrymore sets out to play Hamlet, or take on "the Danish assignment," Mr. Fowler says that he "announced . . . his decision to draw on the black tights of the classic Scandinavian." [5]

Some of the expressions quoted here are no doubt clichés in the ordinary chronological sense. Others, however, seem unusual. The real character of their offensiveness (or presumable offensiveness) does not lie in their newness or oldness, but in the difficulty one has in conceiving an excuse for them. There is enough information in the expressions themselves and in their translations by the reviewer to suggest a certain inevitable silliness. They may be saved only on the principle of dramatization—and perhaps even then only at some expense to their author. "The fuzzy

[4] Remy de Gourmont, "Of Style or Writing" (from his *Decadence*, trans. W. A. Bradley, New York, 1921), in *Essays in Modern Literary Criticism*, ed. Ray B. West, Jr. (New York, 1952), p. 62. Cf. Gourmont, *Esthétique de la langue française* (Paris, 1905), pp. 301–38, "*Le Cliché*."

[5] Edmund Wilson, review of Gene Fowler, *Good Night, Sweet Prince*, in *The New Yorker*, XIX (January 22, 1944), 58; also in Edmund Wilson, *Classics and Commercials* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1950).

raffish style of this book," says the reviewer, "has its special appropriateness to the subject: it is a literary equivalent for the atmosphere in which the events take place. What we get here is the folklore of the Barrymores."

Bad poetic diction includes a wide range of non-meanings—from the fuzziness or lack of focus that may characterize the whole work of a minor and derivative poet to such grossly misapplied cliché quotations as those noticed by H. W. Fowler in his *Modern English Usage*.[6] A person who actually remembers what goes on in the first act of *Hamlet* will not be guilty of a jocular statement that the Ten Commandments are rules which by and large have been "more honored in the breach than in the observance."

IX

One might experiment with the conception that all language is an arsenal of clichés, some expressions, like *man* and *tree*, being only more ordinary and more solidly established than some others,[7] like *umbrageous*, *prelusive*, *fleecy kind*, and *finny tribe*. The usual rule of thumb is that a poet should avoid clichés. But a higher rule is that he should be a master of clichés—at all levels. The mastery of the cliché may be illustrated sharply, if simply, in a kind of twisted echo phrase which has been called the "cliché extended."

> At the drop of a brass hat.
> To gild the lily with radiator paint.[8]

> A penny saved is a penny to squander.
> A man is known by the company that he organizes.[9]

Or the autological expression, which itself sums up the principle:

> Old saws fitted with new teeth.[9]

Such echoes themselves, of course, are not proof against the cliché use. The final worth always depends on a larger context. "Put a beetle in alcohol, and you have a scarab; put a Mississippian in alcohol, and you have a gentleman." This piece of local-color wit has a kind of shoddy

[6] *S.v.* "quotation." Cf. Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Clichés* (New York, 1940), Introduction.

[7] There is such a thing as failure to achieve the established clichés of a language. One may have a sense of something like this in reading one of the classics turned into "Basic."

[8] George Arms. "Clichés, Extended and Otherwise," *SRL*, XXIX (November 30, 1946), 9.

[9] Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*, *s.v.* "saw," in *Collected Works* (New York, 1911), VII, 310–11.

value which is greatly enhanced in Faulkner's *Sanctuary* through the fact that it echoes the utterance of Gowan Stevens, the collegiate slicker and lady-killer.[1]

Nowadays one may identify a genre of lightly sophisticated magazine poems whose main logic is the slight tilt which they give to a pattern of cliché vocabulary, or the dainty jangle of cross-purposes which they create between intersecting patterns.

> Every soldier is his own architect, a specialist
> In the small home constructed reasonably
> Along pretty traditional lines, complete with
> Smiling wife at ease on screened verandah.[2]

And on the other hand:

> For nineteen years I lived a carefree life
> And pain and toil and grief I never knew.
> Although the world rushed madly on to strife,
> My thoughts of national welfare were but few.[3]

It is not necessary to quote more of either poem to establish the contrast: the simple, unaltered reproduction of clichés by the schoolboy veteran about to tell his experiences on being inducted into the army; and the adroitly proffered series of not-quite clichés from the areas of business and advertising in a competent report from the front on the soldier's day dreams. The first poem is an exercise in a limited kind of whimsy—but within its limits, and in contrast to the second, it shows the difference between dead and live language.

Language gains depth and resonance only by being used, and hence some of the most complete and poetically significant uses of words are just those that occur within a poetic tradition. Beside Milton's

> No light, but rather darkness visible
> Served only to discover sights of woe

we put Pope's

> Of darkness visible so much be lent,
> As half to show, half veil, the deep intent.

Gray was glad to call attention to the origin of

> The curfew tolls the knell of parting day

in Dante's

> . . . *squilla di lontano,*
> *Che paia 'l giorno pianger, che si muore.*

[1] *Sanctuary* (New York, 1931), p. 29.

[2] W. W. Gibson, "The Architects," *The New Yorker*, XX (October 1, 1944), 28. Permission the author; © 1944 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

[3] Freshman poem.

A recent examination of mid-18th-century English poetry has defined the "major vocabulary" of that poetry as a complex of quite simple words relating to the age's dominant interest in landscape symbols of optimistic divinity. This vocabulary yields the following synthetically typical line:

> Rise, fair day, before the eyes and soul of man.[4]

The poetry of Wordsworth, coming as an artistic climax and renewal, rather than rejection, of this tradition, is in a sense a poetry that turns very simply to nature and the human soul—yet, inescapably, it does this through words, and not entirely through the simple range of words represented in the line just quoted. Wordsworth's poetry is a sound realization and a deepening of certain nature symbols already available to his age in more or less cliché simplifications. It is a dramatization of those symbols by bringing them into contact with select terms from both higher and lower ranges,[5] from the metaphysical and Johnsonian Latinate range and from the range of low, country words.

> Once again I see
> These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
> Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,
> Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke
> Sent up, in silence, from among the trees.
>
> And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns.

A more directly literary—a more artificial—form of such dramatization was no less a part of the romantic movement in English literature. Thus William Blake, in his juvenile *Poetical Sketches.*

> My silks and fine array,
> My smiles and languish'd air,
> By love are driv'n away. . . .
>
> . . .

[4] Josephine Miles, *The Primary Language of Poetry in the 1740's and 1840's* (Berkeley, 1950), pp. 174, 222.

[5] In his *Prelude; or Growth of a Poet's Mind* (VI, 109–12) Wordsworth, speaking, not with complete fairness, of his own early compositions, alludes to a weakness of trading in "classic niceties,"

> The dangerous craft of culling term and phrase
> From languages that want the living voice
> To carry meaning to the natural heart.

I'll pore upon the stream,
Where sighing lovers dream,
And fish for fancies as they pass
Within the watery glass.

Whether on chrystal rocks ye rove,
  Beneath the bosom of the sea
Wandring in many a coral grove,
  Fair Nine, forsaking poetry!

In these wryly graceful adaptations of an earlier idiom that had come down through the 18th century in Percy's *Reliques* and other collections, Blake gives an advanced demonstration of what it means to be a cliché expert.

SUPPLEMENT

The poet who takes his art seriously will come to his task in a spirit of honest self-criticism. He will not flinch at throwing out whatever words are lack-lustre or lack-weight or in any way undeserving—though such words have a way of hanging on hard. A good poet will dig up long forgotten treasures of vocabulary and put them into circulation again, brilliantly old-fashioned terms which lie hidden in the junkpiles of neglect. He will be on the alert to take advantage of the newest creations of shifting usage. His utterance will be urgent and clear, like the spring torrent; he will pour out a wealth of words, he will enrich his mother tongue. At the same time he will cut through stylistic brambles and make smooth and wholesome the paths of meaning; he will be forceful. And all the while, he will make what he is doing look as easy as play, though it keeps his wit on the rack—as he dances through his roles, now Satyr, now boorish Cyclops.—Horace, *Epistle* II, ii, ll. 109–25

A poet ought to avoid the least taint of what we may call low-breeding (*vilitas*) in his vocabulary; he has to assume a style that marks him off from ordinary speakers—let him carry it off with an Horatian "distaste for the crowd and aloofness" (*odi profanum et arceo*). At the same time he has to be careful not to let his wit stick out like an extraneous ornament; it ought to be closely woven into the texture of his argument. Witness Homer! and the Lyrists! and Roman Virgil! And the verbal magic (*curiosa felicitas*) of Horace. . . . The mighty business of a civil war will be a crushing job for any but an exceedingly well educated poet. Civil and military exploits as a matter of fact are hardly to be managed in verse; prose history takes care of them much better. The business of poetry . . . is a free effusion of the spirit . . . through devices of mystery, through divinely contrived interventions, through the torment of wit into forms of fable. Poetry should sound, not like

a solemn deposition of fact under oath, but like the utterance of a prophetic mind . . . wildly thrown out, as on first inspiration, without tidying touches.

—Petronius Arbiter, *Satiricon*, Chapter 118

When I travelled, I took a particular Delight in hearing the Songs and Fables that are come from Father to Son, and are most in Vogue among the common People of the Countries through which I passed; for it is impossible that any thing should be universally tasted and approved by a Multitude, tho' they are only the Rabble of a Nation, which hath not in it some peculiar Aptness to please and gratify the Mind of Man. Human Nature is the same in all reasonable Creatures; and whatever falls in with it, will meet with Admirers amongst Readers of all Qualities and Conditions. *Molière*, as we are told by Monsieur *Boileau*, used to read all his Comedies to an old Woman who was his Housekeeper, as she sat with him at her Work by the Chimney-Corner; and could foretel the Success of his Play in the Theatre, from the Reception it met at his Fire-side: For he tells us the Audience always followed the old Woman, and never failed to laugh in the same Place.

I know nothing which more shews the essential and inherent Perfection of Simplicity of Thought above that which I call the Gothick Manner in Writing, than this, that the first pleases all Kinds of Palates, and the latter only such as have formed to themselves a wrong artificial Taste upon little fanciful Authors and Writers of Epigram. *Homer*, *Virgil*, or *Milton*, so far as the Language of their Poems is understood, will please a Reader of plain common Sense, who would neither relish nor comprehend an Epigram of *Martial*, or a Poem of *Cowley:* So, on the contrary, an ordinary Song or Ballad that is the Delight of the common People, cannot fail to please all such Readers as are not unqualified for the Entertainment by their Affectation or Ignorance; and the Reason is plain, because the same Paintings of Nature which recommend it to the most ordinary Reader, will appear Beautiful to the most refined.

—Joseph Addison, *Spectator* No. 70, May 21, 1711

One touch of Nature may make the whole world kin, but two touches of nature will destroy any work of Art. If, on the other hand, we regard Nature as the collection of phenomena external to man, people only discover in her what they bring to her. She has no suggestions of her own. Wordsworth went to the lakes, but he was never a lake poet. He found in stones the sermons he had already hidden there. He went moralising about the district, but his good work was produced when he returned, not to Nature but to poetry. Poetry gave him "Laodamia," and the fine sonnets, and the great Ode, such as it is. Nature gave him "Martha Ray" and "Peter Bell," and the address to Mr. Wilkinson's spade.

—Oscar Wilde, *The Decay of Lying*, in *Intentions* (London, 1913), p. 19

In writing *The Playboy of the Western World*, as in my other plays, I have used one or two words only that I have not heard among the country people of Ireland, or spoken in my own nursery before I could read the newspapers.

A certain number of the phrases I employ I have heard also from herds and fishermen along the coast from Kerry to Mayo, or from beggar-women and ballad-singers nearer Dublin; and I am glad to acknowledge how much I owe to the folk-imagination of these fine people. Anyone who has lived in real intimacy with the Irish peasantry will know that the wildest sayings and ideas in this play are tame indeed, compared with the fancies one may hear in any little hillside cabin in Geesala, or Carraroe, or Dingle Bay. All art is a collaboration; and there is little doubt that in the happy ages of literature, striking and beautiful phrases were as ready to the story-teller's or the playwright's hand, as the rich cloaks and dresses of his time. It is probable that when the Elizabethan dramatist took his inkhorn and sat down to his work he used many phrases that he had just heard, as he sat at dinner, from his mother or his children. In Ireland, those of us who know the people have the same privilege. When I was writing "The Shadow of the Glen," some years ago, I got more aid than any learning could have given me from a chink in the floor of the old Wicklow house where I was staying, that let me hear what was being said by the servant girls in the kitchen. This matter, I think, is of importance, for in countries where the imagination of the people, and the language they use, is rich and living, it is possible for a writer to be rich and copious in his words, and at the same time to give the reality, which is the root of all poetry, in a comprehensive and natural form. In the modern literature of towns, however, richness is found only in sonnets, or prose poems, or in one or two elaborate books that are far away from the profound and common interests of life. One has, on one side, Mallarmé and Huysmans producing this literature; and on the other, Ibsen and Zola dealing with the reality of life in joyless and pallid words. On the stage one must have reality, and one must have joy; and that is why the intellectual modern drama has failed, and people have grown sick of the false joy of the musical comedy, that has been given them in place of the rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality. In a good play every speech should be as fully flavoured as a nut or apple, and such speeches cannot be written by anyone who works among people who have shut their lips on poetry. In Ireland, for a few years more, we have a popular imagination that is fiery and magnificent, and tender; so that those of us who wish to write start with a chance that is not given to writers in places where the springtime of the local life has been forgotten, and the harvest is a memory only, and the straw has been turned into bricks. January 21st, 1907.

—J. M. Synge, Preface to *The Playboy of the Western World*, Boston: J. W. Luce Co., 1911, quoted by permission of Random House, Inc., New York.

The historian of the English language may attach to the word inkhorn *in its Elizabethan context meanings which are no part of Synge's meaning when he uses the word in the Preface here quoted. Synge's mistrust of city language as a literary model can be paralleled, with a different evaluative accent, in a passage quoted earlier in this book (Chapter 11) from Congreve. The aristocratic norm of poetic utterance is in the end true to itself only in aiming to improve on the salon, whereas the peasant norm in being truest to itself drives toward some kind of fidelity to the actual.*

CHAPTER 17

GERMAN IDEAS

§ *early German theory, French classicism, Gottsched, the efforts of Breitinger and Bodmer, Lessing's* Hamburg Dramaturgy, *Herder's radical new interests—II. the historical point of view, Italians, Boileau, Dryden, Shakespeare and Spenser criticism, Vico's* New Science, *comparative studies, the folk—III. rise of term "romantic," A. W. Schlegel, Madame de Staël, nature vs. self, Schiller's* Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung, *Schelling on pagan and Christian, F. Schlegel, classic beauty, romantic energy, Goethe's reminiscence, Hegel's three stages, Schiller's* Spieltrieb, *Jean Paul—IV. transcendental reconstruction, Novalis on science, the importance of Kant,* Critique of Judgment, *the beautiful and the sublime, the former distinguished from pleasure, interest, and concept, "purposiveness without purpose," symbolism, severe formalism of Kant's view—V. shift from epic and dramatic norms to lyric, Herder, sense media,* energy, *"music of the soul," synaesthesis, A. W. Schlegel, architecture as music, Schopenhauer, music and will, poet as creator, metaphor and the birth of speech, Herder* Über den Ursprung der Sprache, *later distinction between symbol and allegory —VI. poetry as spiritual regeneration, "myth," F. Schlegel's* Discourse, *Schelling, poetry as philosophy, as absolute reality, Novalis, Fichte, elevation of criticism, poetry as creative dreaming, poetry as fullness, mechanism vs. organism—VII. rationale of the comic, A. W. Schlegel's defence of puns and irony, Jean Paul's* Vorschule, *"infinite incongruity," "humor" and the sublime, F. Schlegel on irony, self-transcendence, the Byronic and dark, metaphysical versions, Heine, K. F. W. Solger, irony the principle of art, Hegel: irony is "Satanic impertinence" —VIII. Goethe on the debt of German literature to English, Kant and English empirical ideas, the German transformation, good for English theory* §

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THOUGH THE ISSUE OF POETIC DICTION HAD, AS WE HAVE SUGGESTED, its continental affinities, Wordsworth and Coleridge fought out their quarrel here pretty much on native grounds. It is hardly necessary to go to the contemporary continent to understand English poetic diction of the 18th century and the reaction against it. Certain much larger critical issues centering around what may be called a new idea of poetic "imagination" were, however, more inevitably tied in with continental romanticism. Wordsworth and Coleridge and Shelley did not arrive at their highly important statements in this area without having learned something from abroad, and especially from the Germans.

German literary theory, caught at its outset, during the latter 17th and early 18th centuries, in the rigors of French classicism (see the systematic genre prescriptions of Gottsched's[1] *Versuch einer kritischen Dichtkunst*, 1730) or engaged in the merely emancipatory (Miltonic, Addisonian, neo-Longinian, and pictorialist) counter-efforts of the Swiss professors Breitinger and Bodmer,[2] began with Lessing and some of his friends to rouse itself and threaten more radical announcements. The next two generations of German litterateurs, in league with transcendental philosophers and aestheticians, were to take over the critical leadership which had passed in its classical phases through Italy and France and during the middle part of the 18th century was held by the British empiricists.

Lessing himself in his series of dramatic reviews in the *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, written shortly after the *Laokoon*, turned a destructive scorn on the Voltairean heroic inflation of French classical drama[3] and did much to modulate Cornelian admiration and Voltairean astonishment into the softer norm of 18th-century pity.[4] Yet Lessing was a classical critic, a "new Preceptist," as Saintsbury has called him, a kind of Prot-

[1] He has been called the "German Johnson," but, as Saintsbury (II, 552) points out, the resemblance between the two ends with the fact that each was a neo-classic stalwart. We have observed Johnson's small respect for the genres.

[2] In their imitation of the *Spectator* entitled *Diskurse der Maler* (started in 1721), in four great manifestos: Bodmer's *Von dem Wunderbaren in der Poesie* (1740) and *Über die poetischen Gemählde der Dichter* (1741) and Breitinger's *Von der Natur* (1740) and *Kritische Dichtkunst* (1740), and in Bodmer's translations of Homer, *Paradise Lost*, and English ballads. See Wellek, *History* I, 147.

[3] See, for instance, the comparison in his paper No. 11 between the ghost in *Hamlet* and that in *Semiramis*. "Voltaire's ghost steps out of his grave in broad daylight, in the midst of an assembly of the royal parliament, preceded by a thunderclap. . . . Shakespeare let only Hamlet see the ghost. . . . The spectre operates on us, but through him rather than by itself. . . . At his [Voltaire's] ghost many are frightened, but not much." *Selected Prose Works of G. E. Lessing*, trans. E. C. Beasley and Helen Zimmern (London: Bohn's Standard Library, 1890).

[4] See *Hamburg Dramaturgy* No. 14, on bourgeois tragedy, and Nos. 48, 79, on pity. J. E. Gillet, "A Note on the Tragic 'Admiratio,'" *MLR*, XIII (1918), 233–8, traces the shift from earlier Renaissance "wonder" and "fear" to sympathetic "admiration" and "pity" and the development of these latter in the period from Corneille to Lessing.

estant Aristotelian, one who claimed to be looking back past Voltaire, Corneille, Scaliger, the neo-classic distorters, to the pure classic idea. He did not "hesitate to admit" that he considered the *Poetics* of Aristotle to be as "infallible as the *Elements* of Euclid." "I would dispose of his authority easily enough if I could dispose of his reasons." [5] We have seen how his attempt upon the neo-classic *ut pictura poesis* left that doctrine fundamentally untouched. The degree of romanticism that shows in Lessing consists in the humanitarian and compassionate shading of his ethical views on tragedy.

Between Lessing and the next major figure in the rise of German critical theory, J. G. Herder, a rather distinct line will be drawn by a reader inclined to recognize some antithesis between the "classic" and "romantic." In the voluminous criticism of Herder—for instance, in such representative works as his *Fragmente zur deutschen Litteratur* (1767) and his *Kritische Wälder* (1769),—we find a group of radically new concerns centering in the relations of poetry to race, geography, and history, and in the creative and symbolic powers of verbal expression.[6] These were germinal and explosive ideas.

The criticism of the Italian Renaissance—the annotated editions of the classics, the formal treatises, the "defences" of poetry—had been a relatively deliberate and stolid performance, circumspectly, even legalistically, argued by the savants of that day. The new renaissance of German romanticism was an eruption of notes, fragments, letters, conversations, pamphlets, prize essays, lectures, and systems, enthusiastically thrown out by poets, novelists, translators, oracular professors, and transcendental philosophers. Where the 16th-century Italians had translated Aristotle, the Germans now translated Shakespeare and made him one of the main inspirations. At the same time, Goethe played the role of a contemporary demi-urge and seemed to his fellows the very incarnation of the theories they were developing.[7] Among literary expressions of first importance appear the various essays of Goethe and his retrospectively dramatic *Conversations*.[8]

II

ITALIAN criticism of the 16th century had looked back with reverence to at least one medieval text, the *Commedia* of Dante, and had been

[5] *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, No. 74. Cf. Nos. 101–4.

[6] See Wellek, *History* I, Chapter 9. The notes to the present chapter do not attempt to make explicit acknowledgement of all that is owing to the first two volumes of René Wellek's *History of Modern Criticism: 1750–1950*. The debt is especially large in the passages referring to Herder. The chapter owes much also to Gilbert and Kuhn's *History of Esthetics* and to the help of Richard J. Browne in verifying citations from the German sources.

[7] See especially *Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen*, 1788, by Goethe's admirer and fellow traveler in Italy, Karl Philipp Möritz.

[8] Published by J. P. Eckermann in 1836.

much concerned to vindicate the new Ariostan form of epic which had developed out of medieval romance and burlesque. Then this kind of Gothicism had suffered a relative eclipse during the era of French neoclassicism. Boileau's scorn for the Italian tradition was representative.

> *Évitons ces excès; laissons a l'Italie*
> *De tous ces faux brillans l'éclatante folie.*[9]

But at least as early as Dryden's appreciation of Chaucer in the Preface to his *Fables* (1700) a similar vein of archaic taste had begun to appear in English criticism. It ran through the 18th century in Shakespeare and Spenser criticism and in some other notable places like Bishop Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, 1763. There were strong developments in a kind of antiquarianism which was to have special import for methods of literary scholarship.[1] At the same time, a general broadening and deepening of historical interest worked into more exalted notions about the nature of literature. One early continental source, though during the romantic period it was not influential,[2] was the *New Science* of Vico (1725) expounding the patriarchal and monarchic origins of society and along with these the metaphoric and symbolic origins of human thought and institutions.[3] Similar trains of ideas appear in 18th-century books on Homer,[4] such as those in English by Thomas Blackwell (1735) and Robert Wood (1769), leading up to Friedrich Wolf's thesis that the Homeric epics are put together from a number of smaller poems handed down by oral recitation.[5] From the time of Herder on, the appreciation of various folk and Gothic literatures and the comparative study of ancient, eastern, and modern foreign literatures (the criticism of literature by age and race)[6] were strongly established, and these interests profoundly affected theories about the nature of literature as the expression of, or the power that shaped, human cultures or human nature in general. Friedrich Schlegel only accented an already pervasive view when he called poetry the most specifically human energy, the central document of any culture. Developments were partly nationalistic, even chauvinistic (as with the poet Klopstock). Ideas of German

[9] *Art Poétique*, I, 43–4.

[1] See *post* Chapter 24.

[2] Vico was scarcely known outside of Italy before Michelet's translation published in 1829.

[3] A devious connection between Vico and Herder has been shown in the notes of the Italian scholar Cesarotti attached to the pseudo-primitive Scottish *Ossian* in the German version by Denis which Herder read. Robert T. Clark, Jr., "Herder, Cesarotti and Vico," *SP*, XLIV (October, 1947), 645–71.

[4] Cf. *ante* Chapter 16, p. 350.

[5] *Prolegomena in Homerum*, 1795.

[6] Herder's main effort on this theme is his Prize Essay of 1773 on the *Causes of the Decline of Taste in Different Nations*. But there is much elsewhere in Herder about climate, landscape, racial customs, politics, and the like.

folk, German literature, and German destiny were rampant. The critics reached out for Shakespeare[7] as a translatable and adoptable expression of the national spirit—even as the 16th-century Italians had exclaimed: "Plunder the ancients and bring home the spoils."

III

One historical question with which the German critics were much occupied was that concerning the difference between "classic" and "romantic." The term "romantic" had come a long way from its early neo-classic uses—largely either neutral or pejorative—relating to medieval adventure stories written in the romance languages. During the 18th century the term had gained so much ground that it now became available to the German critics as an honorific, if problematic, name of a central and dynamic literary conception.[8] The Jena professor and Shakespeare translator A. W. Schlegel[9] devoted the first of his Vienna *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (1808) to rebuking neo-classic exclusiveness and pleading for a "universality of true criticism."

> The groundwork of human nature is no doubt everywhere the same; but in all our investigations, we may observe that, throughout the whole range of nature, there is no elementary power so simple, but that it is capable of dividing and diverging into opposite directions. The whole play of vital motion hinges on harmony and contrast. Why, then, should not this phenomenon recur on a grander scale in the history of man? In this idea we have perhaps discovered the true key to the ancient and modern history of poetry and the fine arts.[1]

Those who have adopted this idea have given "to the peculiar spirit of *modern* art, as contrasted with the *antique* or *classical*, the name of *romantic*." Schlegel's popularization of the "romantic" idea was further broadcast over Europe by Madame de Staël in her *De L'Allemagne*. Coleridge began to use the term and the distinction in his lectures of 1811. "Romanticism" was a highly self-conscious literary movement.

[7] Both Lessing and Herder were main agents for "inoculating" the Germans with Shakespeare (Saintsbury III, 359).

[8] Cf. René Wellek, "The Concept of 'Romanticism' in Literary History," *Comparative Literature*, I (Winter, 1949), 1–23.

[9] The most widely successful propagandist of German romanticism. He was known in England as "our national critic," the "one clear voice out of Germany." He delivered in all four great series of public lectures on literary theory. The *Über schöne Literatur und Kunst*, 1801–03, was superior to, if not more widely known than, the *Über dramatische Kunst und Literatur*.

[1] *A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, trans. John Black and A. J. W. Morrison (London, 1846), p. 21.

The German critics conceived classical art to be a direct, objective, and happily unsophisticated communion with nature, and romantic (or modern) art to be a view of nature complicated, somewhat unhappily, by various phases of reflexiveness and subjectivity. As long as nature had been sound on the inside of man, he could look at it outside him simply and without tampering. When nature in modern times had gone wrong inside him, he looked on nature outside with nostalgic projections; he invested it with a shimmer of his own yearning personality. Modern art, said Goethe's younger friend, the poet-philosopher of Jena, Friedrich Schiller, in his definitive essay *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (1795), is a striving toward an ideal synthesis (of intellect and feeling) which is in its very nature unrealizable, but which is nevertheless a higher thing than the once perfect, now irrecoverable, naive.[2] Schelling, in his *Philosophie der Kunst*,[3] dwelt on the harmony between man and nature which had found adequate symbols in pagan mythology, and on the breach between man and God which it was the dialectical role of Christianity to create, and the resulting unsatisfied, infinite yearning of which modern literature was fated to be the inadequate allegory. Friedrich Schlegel, closely echoing the ideas of Schiller, talked about a *progressive Universalpoesie*.[4] Classic art was conceived by the German critics as "beauty;" romantic art as "energy." Classic was universal and ideal; romantic was individual and "characteristic." Classic was plastic (like sculpture), finite, closed, pure in genre. Romantic was picturesque (like painting), infinite, open, mixed.[5]

In a late polemical statement aimed against the French romantics Goethe said:

> I call the classic *healthy*, the romantic *sickly*. In this sense, the *Nibelungenlied* is as classic as the *Iliad*, for both are vigorous and healthy. Most modern productions are romantic, not because they are new, but because they are weak, morbid, and sickly; and the antique is classic, not because it is old, but because it is strong, fresh, joyous, and healthy.[6]

[2] Schiller divided modern "sentimental" poetry into three kinds, according to modes of feeling: satire, which looks down on reality from the height of the ideal; elegy, which mourns the loss of the ideal; idyll, which imagines a past or future ideal as real.

[3] Composed in 1802–03 and circulated in manuscript, though not published until 1859. His *System des Transcendentalen Idealismus* appeared in 1800.

[4] *Athenaeum* No. 116, in Jakob Minor, ed. *Friedrich Schlegel; seine prosaischen Jugendschriften* (Vienna, 1906), II, 220. Cf. Victor Lange, "Friedrich Schlegel's Literary Criticism," *Comparative Literature*, VII (Fall, 1955), 297.

[5] See, for instance, A. W. Schlegel, *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (London, 1846), pp. 22–7, 340–3, Lectures I and XXII; and René Wellek's account of these passages and of parallel passages in the Berlin Lectures of 1801–04 (*History* II, 48, 58–9).

[6] *Conversations*, April 2, 1829, trans. John Oxenford. See the selections in Bate, *Criticism: the Major Texts*, pp. 400–05.

He was in a somewhat creatively reminiscent mood when he made the following statement—but it will serve here as a summary dramatization of the antithesis we have been describing.

> The idea of the distinction between classical and romantic poetry, which is now spread over the whole world, and occasions so many quarrels and divisions, came originally from Schiller and myself. I laid down the maxim of objective treatment in poetry, and would allow no other; but Schiller, who worked quite in the subjective way, deemed his own fashion the right one, and to defend himself against me, wrote the treatise upon *Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*. He proved to me that I myself, against my will, was romantic, and that my *Iphigenia*, through the predominance of sentiment, was by no means so classical and so much in the antique spirit as some people supposed.
>
> The Schlegels took up this idea, and carried it further, so that it has now been diffused over the whole world; and everyone talks about classicism and romanticism—of which nobody thought fifty years ago.[7]

From a neutrally retrospective standpoint, one might observe that German romantic poetry and criticism were hardly at all primitive or "natural" in the sense that English nature poetry was. German romanticism was historical, Hellenic, actually classic, in an appeal not to Aristotle, but to Homer and the tragic dramatists. It was a spirited and vastly aspiring revision of Winckelmannian classicism. The main paradox of the romantic mind was that it yearned for a primitive or direct nature, yet was compelled to do this through the medium of its own historical awareness and introspective virtuosity.

A further phase in the dialectic of classic versus romantic is marked by Hegel's massively systematic revision of romantic theory, his *Lectures on Aesthetics* (1835) or, as the work is now known in English, *Philosophy of Fine Art*. Hegel divides all art into three stages: first symbolic—where, as in the Egyptian pyramids and temples, the activity of spirit or idea only half struggles forth from the mass of matter; second classic—where, as in Greek sculpture, idea (form) and matter are perfectly fused; and third romantic—where, as in modern music, painting, and (above all) poetry, spirit overflows and envelops matter in self-conscious fulness.[8] There was more moral energy here, less beauty, than in the classic. As Schiller had put it, all art arises out of two impulses and balances these variously—the finite material impulse (*Stoff-*

[7] *Conversations*, March 21, 1830.

[8] G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, trans. F. P. B. Osmaston (London, 1920), I, 1–5, "Introduction to Second Part."

trieb) and the infinite impulse of the idea (*Formtrieb*). The reconciliation of these is the free "play" of the whole human person (*Spieltrieb*).[9] The novelist Jean Paul Richter in his *Vorschule der Ästhetik* (1804) spoke of two extremes, the materialist and the empty idealist (or nihilist), both of which missed the mean of true form and art.[1] It would not be a great exaggeration to say that all German romantic criticism was devoted to the problem of how literature reconciles sensory experience and ideas (the "particular" and the "universal" of Warton's and Johnson's thinking). Their criticism was hence, at higher levels of speculation, devoted to the problem of how literature reconciles the worldly with the transcendental, the external and dubious material object with the spiritually reliable and self-aware subject, the outer world of "nature" and scientific observation with the inner world of schemes and of will and morals,[2] the contingent world of *history* with the necessary world of *system.*

IV

ALL these antitheses and their attempted resolutions may be described as arising in the due course of historic process out of the empirical and analytic trends of the 17th and 18th centuries. They were the romantic reconstruction, in transcendental terms, of the world successively and resolutely abstracted apart by the Cartesian and the British empirical analyses. German romanticism was a retort to scientism, a program for poetic re-establishment of the analytically dissolved harmony between man and nature and between the parts of man's own consciousness. The most lyric and most visionary of the Jena circle of theorizers, Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis), in his essay *Christendom or Europe*, wrote a memorable version of the charge that science was ruining all. Science was making "the infinite creative music of the universe into the dull clappering of a gigantic mill driven by the stream of chance and floating upon it, a mill, without architect and without miller, grinding itself to pieces, in fact a *perpetuum mobile.*"[3]

The whole aesthetic trend owed a great deal to Immanuel Kant, whose "Copernican revolution" had recalled thinking from the atomically and externally oriented analyses of Hume and centered it reflexively on an active and unifying creativity of the knowing subject.

[9] Friedrich Schiller, *Letters upon the Aesthetical Education of Man*, Letters XII-XV, in *Essays Aesthetical and Philosophical* (London: Bohn's Standard Library, 1916, *Schiller's Works*, vol. VI), esp. pp. 60–2, 67, 69–72.

[1] *Vorschule*, No. 69, at end, in *Jean Pauls Sämtliche Werke* (Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe, Weimar, 1935), I, ii, 234.

[2] Cf. Schiller, *op. cit.*, pp. 60–3.

[3] Quoted by Carlyle in his essay on "Voltaire," 1829. See his *Critical & Miscellaneous Essays* (Boston, 1860), II, 75–6.

Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, 1790, was a happily aesthetic afterthought, making an intermediate ground and connection between his earlier philosophy of science or *Critique of Pure Reason* and his philosophy of the moral imperative or *Critique of Practical Reason.* His account of *Judgment* was a decisive statement in the history of modern general aesthetics and at once exerted a strong influence upon literary aesthetics. It has a direct reflection in the essays of Schiller, and it is the ghostly paradigm, in *a priori* lines, of many more highly colored utterances by the poets and literary professors. On the one side, Kant had mapped the world of necessary physical events: conditioned by time and space, the spectacles of our sensory intuition (*Anschauung*), unified by imagination (*Einbildungskraft*), ordered according to the categories of scientific understanding (*Verstand*), and in the end only somewhat tentatively and hopefully affirmed under the sanction of the absolute (or thing-in-itself), the soul, the world whole, and God, ideas which were provided by our highest *a priori* faculty, the reason (*Vernunft*). On the other side, the free moral world of our choices, according to the categorical imperative. And then, after a while, the mediational concept of the aesthetic values, the beautiful (*das Schöne*) and the sublime (*das Erhabene*), both subjective. The latter, the more subjective of the two, was an a-prioristically elevated version of the feelings of awe (in the presence of great magnitude) and of self-congratulatory expansion (in safe recoil from the fear of wild natural energy) which had been described empirically by 18th-century British writers and especially by Burke. These feelings yielded Kant the "Mathematical Sublime" and the "Dynamic Sublime."[4] The beautiful, however, was something higher than accidental and private sense pleasure (*das Angenehme*), had a universal claim on human recognition, and was a norm though not a strictly definable norm (it was "without concept"). The appreciation of it was not "interested" in any possessive or practical way.[5] It was a form of order with which nature was "favored" by our own act of knowing, though we looked on it, unlike the subjectively experienced sublime, as something out there, in nature. It was a "purposiveness without purpose" (*Zweckmässigkeit ohne Zweck*). That is, it was not a teleology toward a nameable further end (like nourishment or shelter), but a highly satisfactory fitting of experience precisely to our own faculty of experiencing, to the progress of our knowledge. Our satisfaction in the presence of the beautiful was a feeling of unification, a harmonious interplay of sense and mind, a perfect freedom from scientific and utili-

[4] Among the fruits of the Kantian sublime may be listed A. W. Schlegel's view (*Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, III) of tragic endurance as a form of self-assertion, for its own sake, in the face of fate, and the similar view of Schiller.

[5] That is, Kant asserted the "autonomy" of the *aesthetic,* distinguishing it from *pleasure,* from *emotion* and *interest,* and from didactic *knowledge.*

tarian necessity. At the same time the beautiful was "the symbol of the morally good."

> In the faculty of taste the judgment does not find itself, as in judging by experience, constrained by empirical laws; it legislates for itself on the objects of so pure a satisfaction, just as reason legislates autonomously on the faculty of desire in morality. And owing to this capacity in ourselves and to the capacity in external nature to harmonize therewith, the judgment finds in itself a reference to something in us and also outside us, which is neither physical necessity nor moral freedom but is allied to the supersensible conditions of freedom. In this supersensuous reality, the theoretical faculty and the practical faculty are mutually and mysteriously interwoven.[6]

Kant's idea of beauty was severe; it related (so far as human making was concerned) almost exclusively to the formal, decorative, and abstract: to Greek designs, foliation on wallpaper, arabesques (things which "mean nothing in themselves"), music without words. The "charms" of direct sensuous pleasure might fuse with beauty,[7] and beauty *might* be combined with perfect natural forms and purposive human artifacts (the good, the ideal), but in neither of these cases was beauty pure. Beauty allied to the good was not "free beauty" (*pulchritudo vaga*) but dependent beauty (*pulchritudo adhaerens*). The two might help *us* by being together, but strictly speaking neither helped the other. It is worth noting that here was a system which conceived Homer and Shakespeare as less aesthetically pure than wallpaper.

V

CERTAIN technical literary notions which were often repeated by the German critics form a very coherent pattern. This was the time, for instance, when modern literary criticism completed one of its major shifts in preference among the literary genres. The 17th-century norm had been, as we have seen, heroic and epic. That of Lessing, in the third quarter of the 18th century, had been dramatic and Aristotelian. Lessing's high regard for the action, the Aristotelian "fable," was a form of classical objectivity that had a fairly close connection with his preference for the colorlessly ideal forms of sculpture over the mere

[6] E. F. Carritt, *Philosophies of Beauty* (Oxford, 1931), p. 123. Cf. *Kant's Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. H. Bernard, 2d ed. revised (London, 1931), p. 251. Our account above uses the terminology of Carritt's translated selections.

[7] Carritt, p. 116; Bernard, pp. 81–2.

phenomenalism of colored painting.[8] Lessing, as we have seen,[9] believed drama to be the most poetic form of literature, and for the reason (related to a distinction made earlier in France by DuBos) that the ordinarily "artificial" signs of language become "natural" signs in drama. They are the direct imitation of persons speaking. But even in the early writings of Herder—and consistently with a general turn of interest from the external world to the knowing and expressing self—we find the notion that not the drama but the lyric is the most poetic kind of poetry, the most direct, free, and unlimited making of the poetic mind. "Lyrical poetry is the perfect expression of an emotion or representation in the highest euphony of language." [1] We have already sampled, apropos of Hegel's division of art into symbolic, classic, and romantic, the more or less normal later romantic view that poetry in general is the expression of mind using itself directly as medium; it is the very energy of mind.

Herder was dissatisfied[2] with the distinction made in *Laokoon* between painting as an art of space and verbal narrative as an art of time (still pictures and moving pictures, as we have suggested earlier). The real difference, said Herder, is that the physical arts work each by its peculiar sense, the ear, the eye, the touch (sculpture is the art of touch),[3] but poetry works by no sense. It is the direct *energy* of the shaping spirit, "immediate of the soul," the "music of the soul." [4] The old *Laokoon* had been written against an external, pictorial analogy between media. The *New Laokoon* of 1910 would look back over a century and a half in which the strong sway of the fascinating spirit had driven toward a general synaesthesis of media or an assimilation of all media to spirit itself and toward their reobjectification in the most intangible

[8] "Mere color and transitory expression have no ideal because Nature has proposed to herself nothing definite in them" (Hugo Blümner, ed. *Laokoon*, Berlin, 1880, 399—cf. 469—notations by Lessing, cited by F. O. Nolte, *Lessing's Laocoon*, Lancaster, Pa., 1940, p. 37).

[9] *Ante* Chapter 13, p. 270.

[1] *Terpsichore*, Part II, in *Werke*, ed. Suphan, XXVII (Berlin, 1881), 171. The earliest fragments of Herder include two sketches for a history of ode and lyric. "The firstborn child of emotion, the origin of poetry, the germ of life, is the ode" (*Werke*, XXXII, 1899, 62).

[2] *Erstes Kritisches Wäldchen*, 1769.

[3] See his *Plastik*, 1778. Cf. *ante* Chapter 13, p. 276.

[4] *Kritische Wälder* I and IV, in *Werke* III, 144, 157; IV, 166. The idea of energy (*energeia*) as a force to be distinguished from its product, a work (*ergon*), may be found in Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IV, 3–8. James Harris, *Three Treatises*, 3d. ed. (London, 1752), pp. 33 ff., uses the terms *energy* and *production*. Cf. Robert T. Clark, Jr., "Herder's Conception of 'Kraft,'" *PMLA*, LVII (1942), 737–52.

The idea of poetry as verbal music is developed by Ludwig Tieck and W. H. Wackenroder, *Phantasien über die Kunst*, ed. Jakob Minor in *Deutsche Nationalliteratur* (Berlin and Stuttgart, n.d.), CXLV, 55–98, esp. 88. Novalis, echoing Diderot, thought of poetry as either inner music or inner painting, "freely modified by the nature of feeling." *Fragmente und Studien*, VI, 21; IX, 3; X, 60, in *Novalis Schriften*, ed. Paul Kluckhohn (Leipzig, n.d.), II, 323; III, 63; III, 290.

or immaterial of media, music. Even so massively solid a thing as architecture might be looked upon as "frozen music." The following statement by A. W. Schlegel summarizes the trend.

> We should once more try to bring the arts closer together and seek for transitions from one to the other. Statues perhaps may quicken into pictures, pictures become poems, poems music, and (who knows?) in like manner stately church music may once more rise heavenward as a cathedral.[5]

In the voluntaristic idealism of Schopenhauer—where the blind *nisus* of will is the noumenal ground of experience—music was to become the fullest and most subtly modulated revelation of that will itself. "The other arts speak only of Shadows." Music "is a copy of the will itself." [6] It has been a commonplace of modern aesthetics—though now somewhat discredited—that music is the center and ideal of all the arts.

If poetic words are the direct energy of spirit, they do not merely present meaning, they create it. Poetry is an "imitation," not of nature, but of the creating, naming Godhead.[7] The poet is a "second creator, *poietes*, maker." This is nowhere more obviously true than in metaphors. The metaphor is conceived as presiding, along with music, at the very birth of speech, of ideas, and of human institutions. Thus Herder in his prize essay of 1770 *Über den Ursprung der Sprache:* The earliest language was a "dictionary of the soul, it was at the same time mythology and a marvelous epic of the actions and speeches of all beings—a constant fable with passion and interest." [8]

> A certain savage sees a lofty tree, with its majestic crown, and is awestruck: the crown rustles! That is stirring godhead! The savage falls prostrate and worships! Behold the history of sensuous Man . . . and the easiest transition to abstract thought! [9]

[5] "*Die Gemählde*," *Athenaeum* II (Berlin, 1799), 49–50, quoted in Irving Babbitt, *The New Laokoon* (Boston, 1910), pp. 124–5. See p. 125 for relations between A. W. Schlegel and Diderot in the "confusion" of the arts, and p. 61 on the claims of F. Schlegel, Schelling, and Görres to authorship of the phrase "Architecture is frozen music."

[6] *World as Will and Idea*, trans. R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp, 7th ed. (London, 1927), I, 333.

[7] Herder, *Über Bild, Dichtung, und Fabel*, 1787, in *Zerstreute Blätter, Dritte Sammlung* (*Werke*, XV, 526).

[8] Herder, *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*, 1772 (*Werke*, V, 51–3). The theory implies rejection of at least three earlier theories of the origin of language: the theory of divine inspiration, the rationalistic theory of deliberate human compact, and Condillac's sensualistic theory which derived language from brutal cries. Herder's idea of the poet as maker is rather closely anticipated in Shaftesbury's *Moralists*, Part III, end of section 2.

[9] *Werke*, V, 53. "*Jener Wilde sahe den hohen Baum mit seinem prächtigen Gipfel und bewunderte: der Gipfel rauschte! das ist webende Gottheit! der Wilde fällt nieder und betet an! Sehet da die Geschichte des sinnlichen Menschen, das*

Primitive man thinks in symbols, allegories, and metaphors. Combinations of these make fable and myth. And so far as modern man is a poet, he is primitive. Later theory (formulated first by Goethe [1] in 1797 and repeated by Schelling in his *Philosophie der Kunst* and by A. W. Schlegel in his *Dramatic Lecture* on Aeschylus) modified this vocabulary, if not the ideas behind it, by making a very insistent distinction between what was considered the merely conceptualized and finite meaning of "allegory" and the metaphorically full-bodied and infinite meaning of "symbol."

VI

THERE are passages in Herder which suggest that human history shows a uniform degeneracy from the glories of the age of poetry to the civilized weakness of the age of reason,[2] and that, having entered on the age of reason, the human race was committed to further technical progress and hence to the extinction of imagination.[3] But a more optimistic view was more prevalent—namely, that poetry was a new means of spiritual regeneration. With the Schlegels, poetry, and especially metaphor, is a perennial mother speech, a promise and vehicle of future human perfection. An even more formidable concept, that of "myth," comes into its own with several pronouncements by Friedrich Schlegel and the philosopher Schelling. The "main difference between the ancient poets and the modern," says Schlegel in his *Dialogue on Poetry*, is that the moderns "have no mythology. But let me add that we are not far from having one, or rather, that it is time we should make a serious effort to produce one." [4] In the *Discourse on Mythology* which forms part of the *Dialogue*, he issues a ringing invitation to a new world view, a new "synthetic" mythology, a "great mythological poem," which is to rise from some source in modern idealist philosophy or natural science.[5] And Schelling carried this theme even further in an elaborate

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dunkle Band, wie aus den Verbis Nomina werden—und den leichtesten Schritt zur Abstraktion!" Cf. Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, trans. Susanne Langer (New York, 1946), p. 85.

[1] In his *Über die Gegenstände der bildenden Kunst;* and later in his *Maximen.*

[2] See, for instance, *Fragmente einer Abhandlung über die Ode*, c. 1765? (*Werke*, XXXII, 69).

[3] For similar views see Vico (with regret) and Fontenelle (with sentiments of welcome to the new age) in his *Traité de la Poésie en Général.* And see the debate between Shelley and Peacock, *post* Chapter 19.

[4] *Gespräch über die Poesie*, 1800, in Jakob Minor, ed. *Friedrich Schlegel: seine prosaischen Jugendschriften* (Vienna, 1906), II, 358, quoted in translation by Victor Lange, "Friedrich Schlegel's Literary Criticism," *Comparative Literature*, VII (Fall, 1955), 301

[5] *Rede über die Mythologie*, 1800, in Minor, II, 357–63; see Lange, *loc. cit.*, p. 302. "What distinguishes Schlegel's thinking from Herder's," says Lange, "is that . . . at this time, he rejects any temptation to resort to a mere re-creation of past mythological substance."

deification of natural "potencies." Ideas were images of divinity when taken as ideas. When taken as real, they were no less than gods. Thus: the "point of absolute difference" between self and the outer world was Jupiter; the ideal world was Apollo; the formative principle embodied in iron was Vulcan; water, the formless principle, was Neptune.[6] In the aspirations of romantic poetical philosophy, the classic pantheon was always eminent. Schlegel[7] and Schelling were prophetic of a kind of mythology which materialized much more vividly during the later 19th century in the work of Comte, Wagner and Nietzsche.

Poetry conceived along these lines would be a kind of philosophy, the most creative and highest philosophy. It would take the place of ordinary philosophy. Poetry—art—was the supreme fact. "Poetry," wrote Novalis in one of his *Fragments*, "is a genuine absolute reality. This is the gist of my philosophy. The more poetical, the more true."[8] Such speculations soared the more wildly when the subjective idealism of Kant (where the sway of the human intellect was limited to appearances) was stepped up by his followers to the phase of absolute idealism —where all reality is the production of selfhood—of inner, conscious, self and outer, unconscious, self, in conflict with each other (as with Fichte) or reconciled in a higher aesthetic and philosophic self (as with Schelling). There were tensions here between the claims of art and those of philosophy, perhaps most sensitively felt by Schelling, who at first made art the sufficient "organon" of philosophy, an eternal revelation, an infinite satisfaction, but in the absolute phase of his idealism[9] later conceived that, although art mythologized and reflected the absolute, philosophy alone could conceptualize and understand it. A distinctive feature of Friedrich Schlegel's diffusely oracular system was his elevation of criticism itself to a metaphoric and creative status equal to that of the poetry which was its object.[1] The critic must illuminate the original exercise of the poet by transcending it. "Poetry," he said, "can only be criticized by poetry,"[2] and the dictum was honored throughout Europe for more than a century in a flourishing tradition of impressionistic criticism.[3]

Nothing could have been less realistic or less naturalistic than the full romantic theory. Poetry as creative dreaming was one of the most

[6] *Philosophie der Kunst*, I, B.1, in *Sämtliche Werke* (Stuttgart and Augsburg, 1859), I, 5, 402ff.

[7] Schlegel's essay *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Inder*, 1808, was to have a considerable influence on the later study of comparative mythology (Lange, *loc. cit.*, p. 303).

[8] *Fragmente und Studien* VI, 468 (*Schriften*, ed. Kluckhohn, II, 411).

[9] In his *Philosophie der Kunst*, written in 1802–03.

[1] Schlegel called his own elaborate review of *Wilhelm Meister* (1798) an *Übermeister* (Lange, *loc. cit.*, p. 296).

[2] Minor, II, 200, quoted by Lange, p. 296.

[3] Cf. *post* Chapter 22, p. 496.

satisfactory conceptions of the era—like the creative dreaming of the Plotinian world soul. In his unfinished novels *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (about the youth of a medieval Minnesinger) and *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* (containing the Märchen of *Hyazinth und Rosenblut* or insight through spiritual love) Novalis offers both statement and illustration of his yearning for a single pregnant and reconciling fantasy.[4] Dreaming, said Jean Paul, is involuntary poetry.[5] The photographic naturalism of the later 19th century ("romanticism on all fours") and the direct emotional display which came to represent spontaneity had far less in common with Schiller and the Schlegels and Novalis than with anti-classical phenomena of the earlier 18th century—the emotivism which we have already described in England (in Germany *Sturm und Drang*) and the realism which went with it—the view of "truth" that may be found in Lessing, in Samuel Johnson, in Diderot.

A poetry which is to be truly philosophical will have to be a rounded image of the human spirit. It will have an imaginative fairness and fullness. True simplicity (*Einfachheit*), said Jean Paul, dwells in the organic whole, not in parts. During the era of rationalistic enlightenment, the imagery most often implicit in theories of poetry had been mechanical—imagery of a verbal force working to produce clear impressions on our mental tablets or to pile up handsome aggregations of atomic parts into literary "compositions." The new German imagery of aesthetic theory was botanical and zoological—an imagery of the spontaneously unfolding and articulated self-conscious spirit, in a word, of organism. The poem sprang like a flower from the poetic genius. Organism, said Schelling in his *Philosophie der Kunst*, is the highest "potency" of nature. (Art, the analogue of organism, is the highest potency of the absolute.) In his system of antitheses between classic and romantic, A. W. Schlegel assigned "mechanical" form to the classic,[6] "organic" to the romantic, and though this was not meant as an altogether derogatory judgment upon the "mechanical," the distinction

[4] Cf. Eugene E. Reed, "Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* as *Gesamtkunstwerk*," *PQ*, XXXIII (April, 1954), 200–11.

[5] *Sämtliche Werke* (Berlin, 1841), XIII, 262, "*Briefe und bevorstehender Lebenslauf*," postscript to the fifth letter.

[6] At least he managed to suggest that "mechanical" form is what is found in the neo-classic (*Lectures on Dramatic Art*, London, 1846, p. 340, Lecture XXII). "Form is mechanical when, through external force, it is imparted to any material merely as an accidental addition without reference to its quality; as, for example, when we give a particular shape to a soft mass that it may retain the same after its induration. Organical form, again, is innate; it unfolds itself from within, and acquires its determination contemporaneously with the perfect development of the germ. We everywhere discover such forms in nature throughout the whole range of living powers, from the crystallization of salts and minerals to plants and flowers, and from these again to the human body. In the fine arts, as well as in the domain of nature—the supreme artist, all genuine forms are organical, that is, determined by the quality of the work." Cf. Wellek, *History* II, 48, 59.

was one way of honoring the expansive aspiration of a romantic mode which under such aspects as the mixture of its genres might suffer momentary disadvantages in comparison with the purity of the classic.

VII

A HIGHLY distinctive feature of German romantic theory was its concern to develop, under the sanction of such major premises as we have been describing, a rationale of the comic. Rational statements, thought Jean Paul, are one-sided.[7] Sober statements, or painful statements, or tearful statements might well seem to have the same defect. The relation of tragedy to comedy became an important issue, and there was a general tendency to set the comic up and dignify it, either as a separate, yet highly significant, laughable genre of verbal art, or as an integral side of the serious. A moderate version of the argument appears in A. W. Schlegel's defence of puns ("sportive word-play") as a small-scale model of the whole poetic structure, a kind of fullness and directness in verbal representation,[8] and in his guarded view that "irony," though it has no place at all in the "proper tragic," yet permeates the whole fabric of Shakespeare's plays and almost the whole range of literature upward from the "avowed raillery of comedy."[9] More radically, other German critics developed various concepts of the laughable into specific technical literary implementations of the paramount concept of transcendence. Jean Paul (known to English students best as the model of Carlyle's gigantic agility in the laughing style and as a source for

[7] Cf. *Vorschule der Ästhetik*, No. 69 (*Jean Pauls Sämtliche Werke*, 1935, I, ii, 234).

[8] "An imagination which has been powerfully excited is fond of laying hold of any congruity in sound which may accidentally offer itself, that by such means it may, for the nonce, restore the lost resemblance between the word and the thing. . . . We do not mean to say that all playing upon words is on all occasions to be justified. This must depend on the disposition of mind, whether it will admit of such a play of fancy, and whether the sallies, comparisons and allusions, which lie at the bottom of them, possess internal solidity" (*Lectures on Dramatic Art*, XXIII, on Shakespeare).

[9] "Shakespeare makes each of his principal characters the glass in which the others are reflected. Nobody ever painted so truthfully as he has done the facility of self-deception, the half self-conscious hypocrisy towards ourselves, with which even noble minds attempt to disguise the almost inevitable influence of selfish motives in human nature. The secret irony of the characterization commands admiration as the profound abyss of acuteness and sagacity; but it is the grave of enthusiasm. We arrive at it only after we have had the misfortune to see human nature through and through. . . . Shakespeare . . . makes, as it were, a sort of secret understanding with the select circle of the more intelligent of his readers or spectators; he shows them that he had previously seen and admitted the validity of their tacit objections; that he himself is not tied down to the represented subject, but soars freely above it; and that if he chose, he could unrelentingly annihilate the beautiful and irresistibly attractive scenes which his magic pen has produced" (*Lectures on Dramatic Art*, XXIII).

some of Meredith's ideas in his lecture on the *Comic Spirit*) devoted Chapter VI of his *Vorschule* to a theory of comic *contrast* in the vogue prevalent after the statement of Kant.[1] The contrast between the stupidity of the comic action and the ordinary human good sense which the spectator projects upon or "lends" to the comic figure constitutes, in Jean Paul's view, an "infinite incongruity" (*unendliche Ungereimtheit*).[2] We have a lively freedom of choice among three series of thoughts, our own insight, that of the stupid comic figure, and that part or aspect of our insight which we lend. Our intellect toys with these possibilities; it plays and dances back and forth in a delightful freedom.[3] Only man has follies; and only man can recognize them. But on a still higher plane, Jean Paul conceives a phase of the laughable upon which he confers a name dedicated in English theory to an earthier usage—that is, "humor." "Humor" becomes an inverted and sympathetically laughable form of the sublime (treading "in the low buskin of comedy" but carrying the tragic mask in her hand), a measure of the finite against the infinite.

> If man, like ancient theology, glances down from the world beyond on the terrestrial world, the latter looks small and vain; if he measures the infinite world with the small one, as humor does, connecting them with each other, then laughter arises, wherein is sorrow and greatness.[4]

Humor annihilates not the single object but finiteness as such—merely by setting it in opposition to the idea.

One kind of climax to such laughing sympathies appears in the essays of Friedrich Schlegel on the theme of "irony."[5] It was possible to play and dance not only in comparing the stupidity of the comic character and our own projected shrewdness, but in comparing phases of our own stupidity and shrewdness, superior evolutions of the self, moments in that "transcendence of self" developed by Fichte in the higher reaches of the subject-object dialectic. Irony was a succession of contrasts between the ideal and the real, a technique by which the "transcendental ego" was capable of mocking its own convictions and its own productions. It was ultimate self-parody. It remained aloof from fixation or satisfaction at any level of insight. It was an avenue to the

[1] To be sampled in English, for instance, in Hazlitt's lecture on "Wit and Humor," introducing his series on the *English Comic Writers*, 1819.

[2] *Vorschule*, No. 28 (*Werke* I, ii, 97).

[3] Cf. Edward V. Brewer, "The Influence of Jean Paul Richter on George Meredith's Conception of the Comic," *JEGP*, XXIX (April, 1930), 243–56.

[4] *Vorschule*, No. 33 (*Werke* I, ii, 116). Kierkegaard's later two-phase transcendence was to move from the aesthetic to the moral (via "irony") and from the moral to the religious (via "humor"). See his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson (Princeton, 1944), p. 448.

[5] *Athenaeum* Nos. 37 and 116 (J. Minor, *op. cit.*, II, 209, 220–1).

infinite, the expression of man's appetite for the boundless; it was expansiveness, it was megalomania. Life at its most incandescent phase destroyed itself as it created.

At the hands of romantic poets, this irony might be very dark, sardonic, misanthropic; the hero stood with cloak pulled round his shoulder thrust out to the cold blast—a Byronic and Poesque figure. "Hot baths of sentiment," says Irving Babbitt, "were followed by cold douches of irony." [6] In its more obvious and emotive phases romantic irony was an engine of self-protection and self-enhancement—the device which the amateur employs when he speaks of his masterpiece as a trifle.

But other phases were hyper-metaphysical. In the essays of the pre-symbolist poet Heine, for example, and in the system of the aesthetician K. W. F. Solger, irony was subtilized until it became coextensive with all art; it was the very principle by which art triumphs over nature, spirit over matter. Looking at even the cruder kind of irony from a metaphysical point of view, Solger accuses it of "conferring a semblance of existence upon nothingness in order to annihilate the latter more easily." Solger conceives the finer irony as an almost mystical energy of artistic insight. It is the creative act by which idea or essence steps into the place of and annihilates phenomenal reality. It is the translation of the world of experience into the artist's ideal dream. The idea, expression of the infinite, surpasses the poverty of its medium. Irony is a transcendental means of contemplative "enthusiasm," a union of impulse and rational lucidity, a poise between the extremes of ecstasy and disenchantment. "Without irony there is no true art." [7] By such stages one emerges again onto the high, transcendentally illuminated plateau of Schiller's impulse of free play (*Spieltrieb*), the reconciliation of *Stoff* and *Form*, the aesthetic equipoise. Hegel, who, like Jean Paul, employed the term "humor" and meant by it something much like what Friedrich Schlegel and Solger meant by "irony," delivered an appraisal which has often been quoted. This activity, he observed, implies the "perversion and overthrow of all that is objectively solid in reality."

> It works through the wit and play of wholly personal points of view, and if carried to an extreme amounts to the triumph of the creative power of the artist's soul over every content and every form.[8]

It is "Satanic impertinence."

[6] *Rousseau and Romanticism* (Boston, 1919), Ch. VII.

[7] Maurice Boucher, *K. W. F. Solger, Esthéthique et philosphie de la présence* (Paris, 1934), pp. 107–10; Kurt Weinberg, *Henri Heine, "romantique défroqué," héraut du symbolisme français* (Paris and New Haven, 1954), pp. 122–5.

[8] *Philosophy of Fine Art*, trans. F. P. B. Osmaston (London, 1920), II, 386; Subsection III, ch. 3, 3, b.

VIII

ONE of Goethe's best-known pronouncements concerns the debt of the Germans to the English.

> Our own literature is chiefly the offspring of theirs! Whence have we our novels, our tragedies, but from Goldsmith, Fielding, and Shakespeare? And in our own day, where will you find in Germany three literary heroes who can be placed on a level with Lord Byron, Moore, and Walter Scott? [9]

Not only German poets and novelists but German literary theorists of the romantic period owed a considerable debt to English writers, though in the latter area the English writers were for the most part less distinguished. We have alluded to the correspondence between Kant's sublime and the empirical ideas of Burke's *Inquiry*.[1] Historians of aesthetic thoery point out how Kant's doctrines about "beauty" are only a reduction to systematic form (though "what a systematic form was that!") [2] of ideas widely current in 18th-century England. In Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, for instance, one finds the disinterestedness of aesthetic pleasure; in Kames, the same disinterestedness and the notion that judgments of taste are immediate; in Addison, the pleasures of the imagination conceived as something intermediate between those of sense and those of understanding.[3]

In the important area of comic theory the Germans had less sufficient antecedents in England than in France, where the leading critical mind of the 18th century, Diderot, after a record of notably *larmoyant* thinking had turned at the end, in his *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, to a view of acting and poetry that laid strong stress on the moment of self-awareness, the ironic reserve of passion. But in general England provided better anticipation of the more solemn themes. The primitivistic ideas of Herder and his successors concerning *Volkspoesie*, lyricism, rhythmic expression, emotion, and the birth of language, were fostered, for one thing, by the very impostures of primitivism, chiefly the Ossianic, that came out of England. The same ideas were available too and were known

[9] *Conversations*, December 5, 1824.

[1] A similar correspondence appears in Addison's *Spectator* No. 420, where he speaks of the pleasure to be derived from expanding our imagination by degrees. Kames's use of St. Peter's at Rome and of the pyramids as examples of the sublime is a curious anticipation of Kant's use of the same examples in contradiction to his own principle that works of human art cannot participate in the sublime. See E. F. Carritt, "The Sources and Effects in England of Kant's Philosophy of Beauty," *The Monist*, XXXV (April, 1925), 315 ff.

[2] Gilbert and Kuhn, p. 323.

[3] E. F. Carritt, *loc. cit.* Muratori, the Italian neo-classic critic, had conceived the aesthetic imagination as the harmonious union of the understanding and the imagination in general. (Gilbert and Kuhn, p. 322; cf. E. F. Carritt, *Philosophies of Beauty*, p. 63.)

to Herder in English Homeric theorists and in general aesthetic theorists like Shaftesbury, John Brown, "Hermes" Harris, Hugh Blair, Percy, the Wartons, and Edward Young. And in England the lyric norm had been in serious preparation throughout the 18th century not only in the writings of the theorists but in the practice of numerous "Great Ode" and elegy writers.[4]

The work of the British aestheticians, literary theorists, and writers on genius lay ready for the German transformation. The transformation, the stepping up, was nevertheless a matter of great moment. What was empirical, descendental, down-looking, matter-of-fact in the British pioneering, became with the Germans metaphysical, transcendental, ideal, and absolute. Theories of how human feelings and trains of consciousness *happen* to work became theories of what art *is*, what poetry *is*, and the *is* implied an *ought to be*. This was in a sense a return to classical and neo-Platonic lines of thought, but with a change that made these lines acceptable to a generation that had undergone the disillusioning experience of the "enlightenment." German classico-romantic literary theory bears the same kind of relation to British mid-18th-century aesthetics and criticism as Kant bears to Hume. The *disjecta membra* of experience, subject and object, and parcels of each, were re-assembled by force of spirit—in a philosophy of life that placed human creation, or art, either at or near the pinnacle. The new synthesis and the new faith had a new subjective richness resulting from the long analytic and skeptical decomposition which had preceded. The new idealism was more epistemological than any preceding idealism. It may be true that such thinking, when it occurred in the department of literary criticism, was not always so close as it should have been to its literary object. Saintsbury has taken pleasure in pointing out some mistakes of the Germans in the interpretation of Shakespeare and other Elizabethan texts, even a certain aloofness from the texts, as in the case of Goethe's *Hamlet* criticism in *Wilhelm Meister*. This, says Saintsbury, might have been written about a translation of Shakespeare. It is a commonplace of literary history to observe the heavy schematism of the German critical effort and to believe that the German critics were less

[4] See Norman Maclean, "From Action to Image: Theories of the Lyric in the Eighteenth Century," in *Critics and Criticism*, ed. R. S. Crane, pp. 408–60. Eighteenth-century English instances of a desire to push even drama toward a lyric norm may be noted. Kames complained that the Greek drama had more action than feeling. It had "no sentiments except of the plainest kind . . . no intricate or delicate situation to occasion any singular passion; no gradual swelling and subsiding of passion: no conflict between different passions" (letter to Mrs. Montague, June 17, 1771, quoted in Helen W. Randall, *The Critical Theory of Lord Kames*, Northampton, 1944, p. 111). (Cf. *post*, Chapter 20, Hugo, Newman, and Arnold on dramatic norms.) The orientalist Sir William Jones by a simple dichotomy rejected "imitation" in favor of lyric feeling. "The finest parts of poetry, music and painting, are expressive of the passions, and operate on our minds by sympathy. The inferior parts of them are descriptive of natural objects, and affect us chiefly by substitution" (*Poems*, London, 1777, p. 207).

lovingly and immediately in touch with the letter of the literary work than the English literary men of the same generation. Yet the latter took what they could of German philosophy, gratefully, and were improved by it. What came out of British empiricism came back raised to a power where it actually met the critical needs of the literary mind or some of those needs.

CHAPTER 18

IMAGINATION: WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE

§ *semantics of "imagination" and "fancy" from 17th century to romantic era, Wordsworth's Preface to* Poems, *1815: elevation of both "imagination" and "fancy," Coleridge's objections, his concern with psychology rather than poems, essential agreement between Wordsworth and Coleridge—II. Coleridge's progress from association to idealism, tabloid treatment of imagination and fancy* (Biographia *XIII*), *German sources and parallels: Schelling's Oration, Kant, Coleridge's system: Understanding, Reason, Primary and Secondary Imagination, coalescence of inner and outer, creation—III. superior idealism of the artist, symbols, nature and the spiritual life, within us and abroad, various other statements by Coleridge:* Treatise on Method, Semina Rerum, Philosophical Lectures, Anima Poetae, Dejection, *emphasis on coadunation, Schelling,* In-Eins-Bildung, *reconciliation of opposites* (Biographia *XIV*), *genesis of* Lyrical Ballads, *"a constitutional malady" —IV. meter and passion, Shakespeare's characters,* Venus and Adonis, *imitation as "mesothesis," Schelling again, transcendental principle and landscape applications, Coleridge on topography, on sonnets, intimate combinations (symbols) vs. formal similes (allegory), "pathetic fallacy," omission of overt statement, reduction of disparity—V. "fancy," Wordsworth's examples, Coleridge on* Venus and Adonis, *on "wit," on metaphysical poets* (Biographia *I, XVIII*), *canonical content, pantheism, philosophy and poetry, modern objections, Coleridge on "pleasure and truth," difficulties, poems about romantic imagination, Shelley, Coleridge—VI. continuation of 18th-century genius, sublimity, emotion, vagueness, Coleridge at the*

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waterfall, Wordsworth's Preface of 1815, Longinianism, numbers consolidated, Johnsonian generality again, infinity and obscurity, emotive congruity, Wordsworth's statements (1800 and 1815), Coleridge: letter to Southey, Biographia *on Shakespeare, "predominant passion," "unity of interest"* §

DURING THE 17TH CENTURY THE TERMS "IMAGINATION" AND "FANCY" had often enough been used in a vaguely synonymous way to refer to the realm of fairy tale or make-believe. Yet here and there (as in the opening of Hobbes's *Leviathan*) the term "imagination" had tended to distinguish itself from "fancy" and settle toward a meaning centered in the sober literalism of sense impressions and the survival of these in memory. This was in accord with medieval and Renaissance tradition, where *imaginatio* and *phantasia* had all along been fairly close together, but where, so far as a distinction of this kind had been made, it was *phantasia* which meant the lighter and less responsible kind of imaging.[1] In the light of 17th-century reasonableness, "fancy" suffered the decline in reputation which we have discussed in an earlier chapter. But "imagination" (when it did not mean "fancy") held its own and even slid into a new place of respect in sensationalist aesthetics. It followed that during the 18th century, whenever the distinction between "imagination" and "fancy" was being made—and it often was—honors were likely to fall to the term "imagination." A certain softness and warmth and depth of good feeling grew around the term "imagination" in its Addisonian sense; it stayed close to the heart of 18th-century poetry. A corresponding coldness and brittleness and a suggestion of unreliable frolic invested the related but opposed term "fancy." As 18th-century "imagination" moved through the stages of association theory to which we have alluded in an earlier chapter, the honors accorded the two terms were now and then reversed—"fancy" assuming the higher role of reference to a more creative mental power, imagination, the humbler reference to the mind's more reportorial kinds of drudgework.[2] But such an assign-

[1] Cf. Murray W. Bundy, *The Theory of Imagination in Classical and Mediaeval Thought* (*University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature*, XII, May–August, 1927, Nos. 2–3), p. 266: "Mediaeval usage was, on the whole, unfavorable to any recognition of the creative capacity of *imaginatio*. *Phantasia* implied the loftier functions, the greater freedom—but at the same time the greater liability to error."

[2] See John Bullitt and Walter Jackson Bate, "Distinctions Between Fancy and Imagination in Eighteenth-Century English Criticism," *MLN*, LX (1945), 8–15. Earl R. Wasserman, "Another Eighteenth-Century Distinction Between Fancy and Imagination," *MLN* (January, 1949), 23–5, calls attention to the reversal of the usual roles of the terms in Arthur Browne's *Miscellaneous Sketches: or, Hints for Essays*, 1789. A. W. Schlegel's later assignment of *Einbildungskraft* to the lower and *Fantasie* to the higher role corresponds with the minority English usage.

ment of honors was a little noticed exception. The relative dignity of the two *terms* "imagination" and "fancy" was so well established in English usage by the end of the 18th century that no matter what revised *meanings* Wordsworth and Coleridge and others might assign to them, it was almost inevitable that the superior *term* should be "imagination."

An early and somewhat haphazard attempt on the part of Wordsworth to discriminate between imagination ("Impressive effects out of simple elements") and fancy ("Pleasure and surprise . . . excited by sudden varieties of situation and accumulated imagery") appears in a note to "The Thorn" in the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. But the first word in the major critical discussion by Wordsworth and Coleridge occurs in the *Preface* to the *Poems* of 1815, when Wordsworth breaks out in an excited correction of William Taylor's *British Synonyms Discriminated*, 1813. Taylor had unfortunately written:

> A man has imagination in proportion as he can distinctly copy in idea the impressions of sense: it is the faculty which *images* within the mind the phenomena of sensation. A man has fancy in proportion as he can call up, connect, or associate, at pleasure, those internal images (*phantazein* is to cause to appear) so as to complete ideal representations of absent objects. Imagination is the power of depicting, and fancy of evoking and combining. The imagination is formed by patient observation; the fancy by a voluntary activity in shifting the scenery of the mind. The more accurate the imagination, the more safely may a painter, or a poet, undertake a delineation, or a description, without the presence of the objects to be characterized. The more versatile the fancy, the more original and striking will be the decoration produced.

That summed up a century more or less of settled usage and compromise opinion. Wordsworth's objection was in part simply that the terms, as an antithetic pair, were turned upside down. "Imagination," not "fancy," should be used to refer to the creative or poetic principle. Furthermore, and this was really the critical issue (though how far Wordsworth distinguished the merely semantic from the critical may be questioned), the very distinction between the two terms was made at too low a level. The higher power (what Taylor called "fancy") had to be something better than the mere power of wilfully (capriciously) "evoking or combining" images—"shifting the scenery of the mind"—making "decorations." There was a "higher" creative power than that. And this was the "imagination."

> Fancy does not require that the materials which she makes use of should be susceptible of change in their constitution, from her

> touch; and, where they admit of modification, it is enough for her purpose if it be slight, limited, and evanescent.
>
> The law under which the processes of Fancy are carried on is as capricious as the accidents of things, and the effects are surprising, playful, ludicrous, amusing, tender, or pathetic, as the objects happen to be appositely produced or fortuitously combined. Fancy depends upon the rapidity and profusion with which she scatters her thoughts and images; trusting that their number, and the felicity with which they are linked together, will make amends for the want of individual value: or she prides herself upon the curious subtilty and the successful elaboration with which she can detect their lurking affinities.[3]

(Even fancy was far from being the uncreative or unoriginal thing, the mere juggler, which William Taylor would have made it.) But imagination! Imagination was a "conferring," an "abstracting," a "modifying," an "endowing" power. The imagination "unites" and "coalesces." It "shapes and creates."[4] In the language of his friend Charles Lamb, the imagination

> draws all things to one. . . . it makes things animate or inanimate, beings with their attributes, subjects with their accessories, take one colour and serve to one effect.[5]

Imagination

> . . . recoils from everything but the plastic, the pliant, and the indefinite. . . . When the Imagination frames a comparison . . . a sense of the truth of the likeness, from the moment that it is perceived, grows—and continues to grow—upon the mind; the resemblance depending less upon outline of form and feature, than upon expression and effect; less upon casual and outstanding, than upon inherent and internal, properties: moreover, the images invariably modify each other. . . . the Imagination is conscious of an indestructible dominion;—the Soul may fall

[3] Wordsworth's *Preface* of 1815 is quoted from *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism*, ed. Nowell C. Smith (London, 1925), pp. 155–65.

[4] Imagination is "that intellectual lens through the medium of which the poetical observer sees the objects of his observations, modified both in form and colour; or it is that inventive dresser of dramatic *tableaux*, by which the persons of the play are invested with new drapery, or placed in new attitudes, or it is that chemical faculty by which elements of the most different nature and distant origin are blended together into one harmonious and homogeneous whole" ("Conversations and Reminiscences Recorded by the (Now) Bishop of Lincoln," Wordsworth's *Prose Works*, ed. Grosart, III, 465; cf. R. D. Havens, *The Mind of a Poet*, Baltimore, 1941, p. 208).

[5] Wordsworth quotes Lamb's essay "Upon the Genius of Hogarth." See Lamb's *Works* (1811), I, 96.

> away from it, not being able to sustain its grandeur; but, if once felt and acknowledged, by no act of any other faculty of the mind can it be relaxed, impaired, or diminished.

In short, where the 18th century had been content with a distinction between a faithfully reportorial imaging faculty, and an unfaithful, or playfully inventive fancy, Wordsworth raised the level of the whole distinction. Simple reproduction interested him not at all. He distinguished two modes of imaging, both inventive.[6] The difference was that one was frolicsome, and inferior, the other was totally serious, and superior.

It was this concession to fancy, though it was only incidental to Wordsworth's aim of elevating the imagination, that became a point of grievance with Coleridge. In Chapter XII of his *Biographia*, he comes down on Wordsworth's venture with a heavy hand.

> If, by the power of evoking and combining, Mr. Wordsworth means the same as, and no more than, I meant by the aggregative and associative, I continue to deny, that it belongs at all to the imagination; and I am disposed to conjecture, that he has mistaken the co-presence of fancy with imagination for the operation of the latter singly.[7]

In Chapter IV of the *Biographia*, after giving Wordsworth the grand credit of having originally inspired his own whole theory of the imagination,[8] Coleridge had already drawn a patronizing distinction between Wordsworth's purpose of considering only the "influences" or "effects" of fancy and imagination "as they are manifested in poetry," and his own more psychologic purpose of investigating "the seminal principle"—that is, the process of imaginative creation, rather than poems themselves.[9] It is our own view that Coleridge did not differ vitally from Wordsworth about "imagination," and that the two may well be considered together,[1]

[6] "To aggregate and to associate, to evoke and to combine, belong as well to the Imagination as to the Fancy." Wordsworth here ventures to object to an opinion expressed by Coleridge in an article contributed to Southey's *Omniana* (London, 1812), II, 13.

[7] *Biographia Literaria*, ed. John Shawcross (Oxford, 1907), I, 194.

[8] "I was in my twenty-fourth year, when I had the happiness of knowing Mr. Wordsworth personally, and while memory lasts, I shall hardly forget the sudden effect produced in my mind, by his recitation of a manuscript poem. . . . It was the union of deep feeling with profound thought, the fine balance of truth in observing, with the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed; and above all the original gift of spreading the tone, the *atmosphere*, and with it the depth and height of the ideal world around forms, incidents and situations, of which, for the common view, custom had bedimmed all the lustre, had dried up the sparkle and the dew drops" (*Biographia*, Chapter IV: I, 58–59).

[9] I, 58–64.

[1] For a development of the difference between them, see Clarence D. Thorpe, "The Imagination: Coleridge *versus* Wordsworth," *PQ*, XVIII (January, 1939), 1–18.

although Coleridge no doubt may be conveniently accepted as the more articulate and more theoretical spokesman of the two.

II

In Chapters V–IX of the *Biographia,* Coleridge traces the growth of his mind from Hartleyan associationism to neo-Platonic and then to German transcendental idealism. Chapter XII lays down in ten Theses the Fichtean and Schellingian phase of ideal realism in which at the moment he finds himself. All this is undertaken in preparation for the grand purpose of expounding "the nature and genesis of the imagination," the literary topic which was laid aside—for want of proper groundwork—at the end of his skirmish with Wordsworth in Chapter IV. Chapter XIII is the well-known Shandean spoof. The tortured exposition abruptly and whimsically gives way to so "completely" convincing a letter of complaint from "a friend" that our author is content to drop the argument and state his "main result" in the following tabloid.

> The IMAGINATION then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree,* and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital,* even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.
>
> FANCY, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word CHOICE. But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.[2]

[2] I, 202. For similar but briefer Coleridgean definitions of "imagination" and "fancy," see *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism,* ed. T. M. Raysor, p. 387. For Coleridge's comparison of imagination to delirium (an all-inclusive coloring of the mind) and fancy to mania (a specially channelled response), see *Biographia,* Chapter IV (I, 62) and Shawcross's note (I, 225–6) quoting *Table Talk,* June 23, 1834, and *Aids to Reflection,* Bohn edition, p. 173. Coleridge recognized combinations of imagination and fancy, or shadings between the two. In *Miscellaneous Criticism,* p. 38, Spenser has "fancy under conditions of imagination. He has an imaginative fancy, but he has not imagination."

Does Coleridge mean the same thing that Wordsworth means in the more informal and literary statement of the 1815 Preface? Or does Coleridge mean something far more profound? The question is complicated by the presence of German ideas in Coleridge's mind.

It is not the issue of plagiarism[3] (though that is present for the biographer of Coleridge) which we would here pursue, but the relation of his theory to certain presiding metaphysical notions of his time, and especially to the notions of Kant and Schelling. It is true that a number of clear and even detailed borrowings by Coleridge from the Germans are to be noted, but let us say in advance that the importance of his debt is not always in proportion to its flagrance or its definability.

The lecture *On Poetry or Art* of 1818, for instance, is a fairly close paraphrase of Schelling's Academy Oration *On the Relation of the Formative Arts to Nature* (1807), and this has an importance to which we shall return in a few pages.[4] One of the most amusing betrayals of Coleridge's way with sources is his coinage of the term *esemplastic* (unifying or coadunative) in Chapters X and XIII of the *Biographia* on the model of Schelling's *In-Eins-Bildung* and apparently with the mistaken notion also that the term is authorized by the German word *Einbildungskraft*.[5] One of Coleridge's clearest debts to Kant appears in his *Principles of Genial Criticism* (1814), where both doctrine and examples, concerning pleasure, taste, beauty, and disinterest, are taken directly from Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. Yet this aesthetic borrowing has no very important relation to Coleridge's own literary aesthetic. The main relation of Coleridge's literary theory to Kant is a vaguer one, and lies in the direction not of the *Critique of Judgment* but in that of Kant's general epistemology and ontology in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. "The writings of the illustrious sage of Königsberg, the founder of the Critical Philosophy," says Coleridge in Chapter IX of the *Biographia*, "more than any other work, at once invigorated and disciplined my under-

[3] In Chapter IX of the *Biographia* Coleridge makes a more or less convincing disavowal of "ungenerous concealment or intentional plagiarism," though he admits that his doctrines are likely to show a remarkable coincidence with those of Schelling. "I regard truth as a divine ventriloquist. I care not from whose mouth the sounds are supposed to proceed, if only the words are audible and intelligible" (*Biographia* I, 105). And in *Anima Poetae* under the year 1804 (Boston, 1895, p. 89): "In the preface of my metaphysical works, I should say, 'Once for all, read Kant, Fichte, etc., and then you will trace, or, if you are on the hunt, track me.' Why, then, not acknowledge your obligations step by step? Because I could not do so in a multitude of glaring resemblances without a lie, for they had been mine, formed and full-formed, before I ever heard of these writers." An early instance of the charge of plagiarism against Coleridge appears in De Quincey's article "The Plagiarisms of S. T. Coleridge" in *Blackwood's Magazine* for March, 1840.

[4] See *Biographia*, I, 95, 243, for another free translation from Schelling.

[5] *Biographia Literaria*, I, 107, 195, 249; *Anima Poetae* (Boston, 1895), p. 199; *Letters* (1895), I, 405–406; marginalia to J. G. E. Maass, quoted in Sarah Coleridge, ed. *Biographia Literaria* (1847), I, 173. Cf. Patrick L. Carver, "Evolution of the Term Esemplastic," *MLR*, XXIV (1929), 329.

standing." It may be worth adding that the ideas concerned had been rather widely foreshadowed throughout the neo-Platonic tradition, a tradition in which Coleridge was deeply versed, and one in which Kant himself stood as the theistic and transcendental champion of the age against Spinozan immanentism and pantheism.[6]

We may see the relation of Coleridge's "imagination" and "fancy" to German ideas better if we set beside the definitions already quoted from Chapter XIII of the *Biographia* the following passage, defining two Kantian terms, "Understanding" (*Verstand*) and "Reason" (*Vernunft*), from an early essay by Coleridge in *The Friend:*

> By understanding, I mean the faculty of thinking and forming judgments on the notices furnished by the sense, according to certain rules existing in itself, which rules constitute its distinct nature. By the pure reason, I mean the power by which we become possessed of principles—the eternal verities of Plato and Descartes, and of ideas, not images.[7]

And along with this let us set down the development of these ideas, perhaps not quite consistently, in Coleridge's later religious and philosophic work entitled *Aids to Reflection.*

> 1. Understanding is discursive. 2. The Understanding in all its judgments refers to some other Faculty as its ultimate Authority. 3. Understanding is the Faculty of *Reflection.*

> 1. Reason is fixed. 2. The Reason in all its decisions appeals to itself, as the ground and *substance* of their truth. (Hebrews vi, 13.) 3. Reason of Contemplation. Reason indeed is much nearer to SENSE than to Understanding: for Reason (says our great HOOKER) is a direct aspect of Truth, an inward Beholding, having a similar relation to the Intelligible or Spiritual, as SENSE has to the Material or Phenomenal.[8]

[6] René Wellek, *Immanuel Kant in England*, pp. 115 ff., points out that Coleridge's manuscript *Logic* is largely an elaborate exposition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, with architectonics, tables of categories, and antinomies taken over literally. The direct relation of this fact to literary matters is no doubt slight. Wellek says (p. 114), "Of the major writings of Coleridge least of Kant's immediate influence is to be found in the *Biographia Literaria.*" Various borrowings by Coleridge from Schiller's *Naive and Sentimental Poetry*, Jean Paul's *Vorschule*, A. W. Schlegel's *Dramatic* lectures, are pointed out by T. M. Raysor in his editions of Coleridge's *Miscellaneous Criticism* and *Shakespeare Criticism.* Shawcross (I, 231) notes that Coleridge's history of association psychology in Chapters V and VI of the *Biographia* is drawn in part from J. G. E. Maass, *Versuch über die Einbildungskraft*, 1797. See also Wellek, *History* II, 151–3.

[7] *Complete Works*, ed. W. G. T. Shedd (New York, 1853), II, 164.

[8] *Aids to Reflection* (London, 1913), p. 148, "On the Difference in Kind of Reason and the Understanding." Joseph W. Beach, *The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth Century Poetry* (New York, 1936), p. 321, believes that Coleridge's dis-

Let four terms, then, "Primary Imagination"↔"Understanding," "Secondary Imagination"↔"Reason," stand as a kind of ascending series, with affinities between the first (or lower) and the second (or upper) pair indicated by the sign ↔. And let "Fancy" ride as a kind of side effort or false parallel to "Secondary Imagination." The Platonic sensory knowledge (*eikasia*), more or less the equivalent of the Kantian immediate sensory intuition (*Anschauung*), does not appear in the Coleridgean system, but so far as it might be distinguished in itself it would be conceived as a shadowy beginning which is substantiated or shaped up into the world of our everyday external experience (horses and houses) by the faculty of Primary Imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) working in accord with the schemes or laws of the scientific Understanding. This "Imagination" is a primary creative act, a willed activity of spirit, a self-consciousness, a "self-realizing intuition," joining and coalescing the otherwise separated parts of our self, the outer unconscious, and the inner conscious, the object and the subject. To support this part of the interpretation, we turn back to the Theses of *Biographia*, Chapter XI and to certain Kantian passages in Chapter VII.

> There are evidently two powers at work, which relatively to each other are active and passive; and this is not possible without an intermediate faculty, which is at once both active and passive. (In philosophical language, we must denominate this intermediate faculty in all its degrees and determinations, the IMAGINATION.[9]

The two powers between which the Imagination mediates are the "subject" and "object" of Chapter XII and the two opposing and counteracting forces described in the involved Schellingian terms of Chapter XIII before it is interrupted by the letter from the friend.[1] Primary Imagination is a human creative act which we may take as a type of and participation in the Divine act, though we are told that Coleridge later deleted that clause in a copy of the *Biographia*—"a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM."

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tinction is derived, with some misunderstanding, merely from Kant's Preface to his *Critique of Pure Reason.*

Neo-Platonic and Christian writers were accustomed to make a similar distinction between the terms *scientia* and *sapientia.* See, for instance, Augustine, *De Trinitate,* XII, 25. Cf. Aristotle's distinction, in *De Anima,* between the passive and the active intellect.

[9] I, 86.

[1] Cf. Clarence D. Thorpe, "The Imagination: Coleridge *versus* Wordsworth," *PQ,* XVIII (January, 1939), 8.

III

EVERY human being, then, is, so far as he perceives anything at all, a creator and an idealizing agent. What then about the special role of the artist (the poet or maker)? What more can *he* do? What kind of "imagination" does *he* enjoy?

> . . . in common language, and especially on the subject of poetry, we appropriate the name to a superior degree of the faculty, joined to a superior voluntary control over it.[2]

We conceive the "Secondary Imagination," a higher plastic power. This reworks the perceptual products of primary imagination into concrete expressions (symbols) of those "ideas"—the self, the absolute, the world, and God—which are otherwise, conceptually, given by that superior part of the transcendental mind the Reason. Nature, especially as seen by the poet, symbolizes the spiritual life of man and hence too that higher life in which the spiritual life of man participates, "the one life within us and abroad." The ideas of such a life were, as Kant conceived them, framed by the Reason only as regulative hypotheses. But for Coleridge (as for the German post-Kantians, Schelling, Fichte, and Hegel), these ideas were realities (*noumena*) and the Reason was the faculty of philosophic insight into them—as Secondary Imagination gave them symbolic embodiments.[3] Kant had distinguished this imagination, under the name of the "aesthetic," from the "productive" (Coleridge's "primary Imagination") and from the "reproductive" (Coleridge's "fancy").

Various other writings of Coleridge give more poetically colored and less difficult accounts of that higher meaning of nature which he conceived it to be the role of poetic imagination to create and in creating know.

> Certainly the Fine Arts belong to the outward world, for they all operate by the images of sight and sound, and other sensible impressions; and without a delicate tact for these, no man ever was, or could be, either a Musician or a Poet; nor could he attain to excellence in any one of these Arts; but as certainly he must always be a poor and unsuccessful cultivator of the Arts

[2] Chapter VI (I, 86).

[3] Coleridge's *Preliminary Treatise on Method*, 1818, assigns to aesthetics a "middle position" between physics, which deals with sensory facts by hypothetical constructions, and metaphysics, which is concerned with "laws" apprehended through the *Ideas* of the reason (J. H. Muirhead, *Coleridge as Philosopher*, New York, 1930, Chapter VII, pp. 197–8). Cf. Shawcross, ed. *Biographia Literaria*, I, lvii–lviii.

if he is not impelled first by a mighty, inward power, a feeling, *quod nequeo monstrare, et sentio tantum;* nor can he make great advances in his Art, if, in the course of his progress, the obscure impulse does not gradually become a bright, and clear, and living Idea! [4]

If the artist copies the mere nature, the *natura naturata*, what idle rivalry! . . . Believe me, you must master the essence, the *natura naturans*, which presupposes a bond between nature in the higher sense and the soul of man. . . . In the objects of nature are presented, as in a mirror, all the possible elements, steps, and processes of intellect antecedent to consciousness, and therefore to the full development of the intelligential act; and man's mind is the very focus of all the rays of intellect which are scattered throughout the images of nature.[5]

To have a genius is to live in the universal, to know no self but that which is reflected not only from the faces of all around us, our fellow-creatures, but reflected from the flowers, the trees, the beasts, yea from the very surface of the waters and the sands of the desert. A man of genius finds a reflex of himself, were it only in the mystery of being.[6]

In looking at objects of Nature while I am thinking, as at yonder moon dim-glimmering through the dewy window-pane, I seem rather to be seeking, as it were *asking* for, a symbolical language for something within me that already and forever exists, than observing anything new. Even when that latter is the case, yet still I have always an obscure feeling as if that new phenomenon were the dim awaking of a forgotten or hidden truth of my inner nature.[7]

Or the emphasis might fall sadly on the waning or loss of that inner power of investiture.

O Lady! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live:
Ours is her wedding-garment, ours her shroud!
  And would we aught behold, of higher worth,
Than that inanimate cold world allowed
To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,
  Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth

[4] *Preliminary Treatise on Method*, 1818, III, 21 (ed. Alice D. Snyder, London, 1934, pp. 62–3).
[5] *On Poesy or Art*, in *Biographia*, ed. Shawcross, II, 257–8.
[6] *The Philosophical Lectures (1818–19)*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (New York, 1949), p. 179.
[7] *Anima Poetae* (Boston, 1895), p. 115.

A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
  Enveloping the Earth—
And from the soul itself must there be sent
  A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,
Of all sweet sounds the life and element! [8]

All these statements about the meaning of art and the meaning of nature refer to a kind of union between the two. They could all be developed under the aspect of union, the Schellingian emphasis on coalescence, on reconciliation. And it is precisely this emphasis that is the most distinctive feature of Coleridge's theory. This, though it was a tenet of absolute idealism, was capable of working out, and in Coleridge's thinking to some extent did work out, into a dualistic and variously applicable theory of poems. Reconciliation of what? Primarily and generically of the two sides of self, conscious and unconscious, subject and object—and of certain related abstract entities. *In-Eins-Bildung*, said Schelling, *des Einem mit dem Vielen. In-Eins-Bildung des Realen und Idealen.*[9] Or, to give the antithesis a warmer color, *In-Eins-Bildung* (coadunation) of *man* and *nature*. Coleridge's lecture *On Poesy or Art* (1818) is in parts a close paraphrase of Schelling's oration *On the Relation of the Formative Arts to Nature*.

> Art itself might be defined as of a middle quality between a thought and a thing, or, as I have said before, the union and reconciliation of that which is nature with that which is exclusively human. It is the figured language of thought, and is distinguished from nature by the unity of all parts in one thought or idea.[1]

In a passage of the *Biographia* much celebrated recently, Coleridge writes his most enthusiastic and expansive account of the aesthetic "reconciliation."

> Imagination. . . . reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and of freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgement ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature; the

[8] Cf. Wordsworth's *Ode: Intimations*. . . . "There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream. . . ."

[9] Shawcross, I, 249.

[1] *Biographia Literaria*, II, 254–5.

> manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry.[2]

The weaving back and forth of Coleridge's syntax and the variation of his phrasing may tend to obscure the generic alignment of the eleven (partially overlapping) pairs of opposites which we now repeat in tabular form.

Imagination reconciles (balances, or harmonizes):

A		B
1. sameness	with	difference
2. general	"	concrete
3. idea	"	image
4. representative	"	individual
5. familiarity	"	novelty
6. order	"	emotion
7. judgment	"	enthusiasm
8. artificial	"	natural

Imagination subordinates:

A		B
1. art	to	nature
2. manner	"	matter
3. admiration of the poet	"	sympathy with the poetry

Column A will come under the head of the "subject," the "human;" Column B under that of the "object," "nature." In the first part of the same chapter Coleridge had given a nice example of reconciliation between familiarity and novelty, treated in such a way as to suggest the intimate relation of these reconcilable opposites with another and more difficult pair, the inner human spirit and the outer transcendental or supernatural. The example is so engaging an incident of English literary history as almost to preclude the possibility of cavil.

> During the first year that Mr. Wordsworth and I were neighbors, our conversations turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exerting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colors of imagination. The sudden charm, which accidents of light

[2] Chapter XIV (II, 12). Alice D. Snyder, *The Critical Principle of the Reconciliation of Opposites as Employed by Coleridge* (Ann Arbor, 1918), p. 28, was apparently the first modern writer to quote this passage. She was followed by T. S. Eliot in his essay on Marvell (1921), by I. A. Richards in his *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924). Cf. René Wellek, in *The English Romantic Poets*, ed. T. M. Raysor (New York, 1950), p. 109.

> and shade, which moonlight or sun-set diffused over a known and familiar landscape, appeared to represent the practicability of combining both. . . . In this idea originated the plan of the "Lyrical Ballads;" in which it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us.[3]

Coleridge's interest in opposites and their reconciliation was, says Miss Snyder, "a constitutional malady." And she is able to present a very miscellaneous set of topics—foam islands shaping and reshaping below a waterfall, a tooth-ache and the forgetting of it, a cone of loose sand rising and sinking at the bottom of a spring, the movement of ghostlike crowds through the sepulchral fixities of London streets—all of which provoke in Coleridge reflections on this theme.[4]

IV

One might expect that the doctrine of reconciliation would be a wide and varied sanction for poetic moods and genres and that it would have a varied and subtle application in Coleridge's practical criticism. Certain more precise technical modulations do appear, for instance the treatment in *Biographia*, Chapter XVIII, of meter as a balance between passion and organization, or in the notes on *The Tempest* an observation about the individuality of Shakespearian women despite their essential sameness, in the notes on *Hamlet* a comment on the tragi-comedy of a semi-feigned madness.[5] In his lecture "Shakespeare, a Poet Generally" (corresponding in part to Chapter XV of the *Biographia*) Coleridge executes a rhapsodic analysis of a couplet from *Venus and Adonis.*

> Look! how a bright star shooteth from the sky;
> So glides he in the night from Venus' eye.

[3] Chapter XIV (II, 5–6). Wellek, *History* II, 177, notes the anticipation of Coleridge's celebrated "willing suspension of disbelief" by Moses Mendelssohn, *Rhapsodie über die Empfindungen*, 1761, and *Morgenstunden*, 1785.

[4] Snyder, pp. 20 ff., quoting *Anima Poetae* (Boston, 1895), pp. 7, 14, 44; *Works*, IV, 434.

[5] Cf. Snyder, pp. 29–30, 37, 48–9.

> How many images and feelings are here brought together without effort and without discord, in the beauty of Adonis, the rapidity of his flight, the yearning, yet hopelessness, of the enamoured gazer, while a shadowy ideal character is thrown over the whole!

In other places, he makes a highly reflexive application of the doctrine of reconciliation to the work of art itself conceived as a non-illusory object.

> Imitation, as opposed to copying, consists either in the interfusion of the SAME throughout the radically DIFFERENT, or of the different throughout a base radically the same.[6]

> Imitation is the mesothesis of Likeness and Difference. The difference is as essential to it as the likeness; for without the difference, it would be Copy or fac-simile.[7]

We have been bringing ourselves, however, to the point of asking an important question about the limits of this doctrine of imaginative reconciliation and hence about the whole theory of poetic imagination entertained by Coleridge and, in fairly close concert, by Wordsworth. Was their theory in fact a general theory of poetry? Or was it not rather a theory slanted very heavily toward a particular kind of poetry, one in which they themselves, and especially Wordsworth, excelled? (The latter status would not have precluded a fairly wide extension of the theory, even by Coleridge and Wordsworth if they had been sufficiently interested.) Let us return for a moment to that lecture of Coleridge's on *Poesy or Art*, so intimately related to Schelling's oration *On the Relation of the Formative Arts to Nature.*

> Now so to place these images, totalized, and fitted to the limits of the human mind, as to elicit from, and to superinduce upon, the forms themselves the moral reflexions to which they approximate, to make the external internal, the internal external, to make nature thought, and thought nature,—this is the mystery of genius in the Fine Arts.[8]

Or, we might quote here again that passage which we have quoted just above from Chapter XIV of the *Biographia*, about light and shade, moonlight or sunset "over a known and familiar landscape." In such passages we are confronted in a special way with the important difference between Primary Imagination and Secondary Imagination. We are asked to focus a special attention upon the distinction between the first (a

[6] *Biographia*, Chapter XVIII (II, 56).
[7] *Table Talk*, *Works*, VI, 468. Cf. Snyder, p. 52.
[8] *Biographia Literaria*, II, 258.

basic and universal power of knowing) and the second (a special power of artistic knowing—yet *not in principle different* from the first). This difficult paradox has haunted all idealistic theory of art from Plotinus to Croce and Susanne Langer. In this crucial instance (crucial because Coleridge and Wordsworth as poet-philosophers did have an eye closely on poems and wished to remain close to them) it may be doubted if the theory succeeds in making the transition from general epistemology to poetics without a leap that largely abandons the epistemology as a formal principle. The theory, at least in some phases, seems to have in mind especially a kind of poetry which will somehow, either by some kind of dramatic figuration, or perhaps by a merely contentual reference, be the appointed representative of the basic philosophy. Yet this poetry, for all that, may not be a sufficient demonstration or illustration of the theory. It is one thing to say that all our knowledge is a "self-realizing intuition" which reconciles subject or conscious self with object or nature. (It is impossible to write a poem which will specially illustrate this transcendental principle. How could any one expression better illustrate or embody it than any other?) It is a vastly different thing to say that the forms of nature are, or are capable of being, suited to moral reflections—or that the latter can be, in any peculiar way, elicited from or superinduced upon the former. This is a very special showing of how "nature" is "thought," and "thought" is "nature." (It may be quite possible to illustrate this in a special kind of poem.)

And so we have such more special statements of preference by Coleridge as that in Chapter XV of the *Biographia*. Images become poetic "when a human and intellectual life is transferred to them from the poet's own spirit, 'Which shoots its being through earth, sea, and air.' "

> Behold yon row of pines, that shorn and bow'd
> Bend from the sea-blast, seen at twilight eve.

In these lines, he says, "There is nothing objectionable, but also nothing to raise them much above the level of a "book of topography" or a "descriptive tour." But the "same image" can be raised to a "semblance of poetry" by being altered thus:

> Yon row of bleak and visionary pines,
> By twilight glimpse discerned, mark! how they flee
> From the fierce sea-blast, all their tresses wild
> Streaming before them.[9]

Or we have the following in the Introduction to the volume of sonnets which Coleridge edited in 1796.

[9] *Biographia*, II, 16–17. Cf. Coleridge's lecture *Shakespeare, a Poet Generally*.

> Those sonnets appear to me to be the most exquisite in which moral sentiments are deduced from and associated with the scenery of Nature. They create a sweet and indissoluble union between the intellectual and the material world.[1]

Or this in a letter to Southey of 1802.

> A poet's heart and intellect should be *combined*, intimately combined and unified with the great appearances of nature. . . .[2]

In this letter, Coleridge is intent on making a distinction between such "intimate" combinations and certain other combinations, or loose mixtures, such as have to be made explicit by "dim" moralizing analogies and "formal similes." [3]

We have similar statements by Wordsworth (with a more genetic accent): that "images and sentiments" should be "wedded" naturally in the mind; images should rise to the mind unsought for, like "exhalations." [4] "The subject and simile should be as much as possible lost in each other," especially in lyric poetry.[5]

In short, we have a theory of "animating" imagery, of romantic anthropomorphism, what Ruskin not many years later termed the "pathetic fallacy" (and one may echo the term without the least hint of derogation), the fallacy, the fiction, of portraying the face of nature so as to invest it with reflections of our own mind and feelings and hence with

[1] *Biographia*, I, 207.

[2] *Letters* (Boston, 1895), I, 403.

[3] Coleridge here verges on the distinction between "symbol" and "allegory" which he was later to make after the example of Goethe and other Germans (cf. *ante* p. 375). "An allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language, which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses; the principal being more worthless than its phantom proxy, both alike unsubstantial, and the former shapeless to boot. On the other hand a symbol . . . is characterized by a translucence of the special [the species] in the individual, or of the general [the genus] in the special, or of the universal in the general; above all by the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal" (*The Statesman's Manual*, in *Works*, ed. W. G. T. Shedd, New York, 1884, I, 437). Coleridge and the Germans lay a negative stress on "allegory" which in its broadest application the word will perhaps not bear. If we set aside this semantic difficulty, however, we may recognize in the distinction itself a valid effort to discriminate between various abstractly asserted kinds of imagery and that kind (conveniently called "symbol") which a recent critic of *The Ancient Mariner* has aptly described as "massive," "focal," and "not arbitrary" (R. P. Warren, *The Ancient Mariner*, New York, 1946, p. 76). But Coleridge apparently had no very intent gaze upon the "symbol." In other places he speaks of the symbol as being a part of the whole which it represents, and he seems to be thinking of synecdoche. (See *Miscellaneous Criticism*, p. 99, and *Aids to Reflection*, London, 1913, p. 173 n.) He is sometimes willing to shade his opinion of allegory or to stretch a point to save a poet from the odium of allegorical imputation. *Don Quixote* is "substantial living allegory" (*Miscellaneous Criticism*, p. 102), and Dante is only quasi-allegorical (*Miscellaneous Criticism*, p. 150).

[4] "Letter to Mathetes," *Prose Works*, ed. Grosart, I, 318. Cf. *Prelude*, IV, 113–14.

[5] *Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt (Oxford, 1939), I, 158–9.

expressions of the divinity which is the "one life within us and abroad." And this was in fact the way Goethe and Schiller defined modern or "sentimental" poetry. A brilliant host of symbolic nature poems by Blake, by Coleridge, by Keats, by Shelley, and above all by Wordsworth, illustrate the theory and justify it. No poetry before had shaded overt statement of spiritual or psychological meaning (the "still, sad music of humanity," the presence "whose dwelling is the light of setting suns") so curiously, so dramatically, and with such sleights and duplicities of meaning, into the metaphoric intimations of the literally described landscape ("the soft inland murmur," the "one green hue," the "wreaths of smoke . . . as . . . of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods.") "A puddle," says Hazlitt, speaking of Wordsworth's *Excursion*, "is filled with preternatural faces."

The theory of imagination elaborated by Coleridge, and less precisely but in substantially the same way, by Wordsworth, was an excellent description of their own best poetry in its formal, structural, and metaphoric aspect. One might redescribe this structure approximately in these terms: It is a structure which makes only a restrained use of the central overt statement of similitude which had been so important in all poetry up to that time.[6] Both tenor and vehicle are wrought in a parallel process out of the same material. The landscape is both the occasion of subjective reflection or transcendental insight and the source of figures by which the reflection or insight is defined. In such a structure, finally, the element of tension in disparity may not be prominent. The interest derives not from our being aware of disparity in stated likeness, but in the opposite activity of our discerning the design and the unity latent in a multiform sensuous picture. This is no doubt a form of "reconciliation." At the same time there are certain clearly anti-"metaphysical" tendencies here—the absence of overt definition, the reduction of disparity, the play of phenomena on the one hand and of "spirit" on the other, rather than of entities conceived substantially.

V

This is the place to recall that inferior faculty which at the outset was set apart from "imagination"—the "fancy," with its fixities and definites, its capricious, light, playful, and coldly asserted way of connecting these. Wordsworth's examples of "fancy" are Shakespeare's description of Queen Mab, a rather silly couplet by Chesterfield,

[6] Wordsworth's examples of "imagination" in his 1815 Preface are drawn chiefly from his own poems and from Milton. The longest example of his own poetry, from *Resolution and Independence*, is actually framed as an overt similitude—yet, as he himself observes, it is a very subtly complicated "modification" of a natural phenomenon into a human meaning.

The dews of the evening most carefully shun,
They are the tears of the sky for the loss of the sun,

and a far from silly, if lighthearted, minor "metaphysical" poem by Charles Cotton, an *Ode Upon Winter.*

a magazine
Of sovereign juice is cellared in;
Liquor that will the siege maintain
Should Phoebus ne'er return again.

Wordsworth speaks of this poem with considerable affection and even admiration (for the "extreme activity of intellect" displayed and the "correspondent hurry of delightful feeling"). "Though myself a water drinker, I cannot resist the pleasure of transcribing what follows." But the patronage is apparent, and the second-rate status of "fancy" is never for a moment questioned. Coleridge's example of fancy, which does not appear in the *Biographia*, but in the lecture on *Shakespeare, a Poet Generally*, is a quatrain from *Venus and Adonis.*

Full gently now she takes him by the hand,
A lily prisoned in a jail of snow,
Or ivory in an alabaster band:
So white a friend ingirts so white a foe.[7]

Coleridge's more severe animadversions upon this kind of thing were likely to occur in the immediate context of the word "wit" rather than in that of "fancy." But a close relation is plain enough. In Chapter I of the *Biographia* he observes that "Our faulty elder poets [from Donne to Cowley] sacrificed the passion and passionate flow of poetry, to the subtleties of intellect, and to the starts of wit . . . the heart to the head." They indulged in "the most fantastic out-of-the-way thoughts," though "in the most pure and genuine mother English."[8] In Chapter XVIII a rather bad passage from Cowley's *Pindaric Odes* is rebuked in the following terms:

. . . such language and such combinations are the native produce neither of the fancy nor of the imagination; . . . their opera-

[7] Coleridge here defines "fancy" ("the faculty of bringing together images dissimilar in the main by some one point or more of likeness") in a way that goes far to invite the quantitative interpretation which I. A. Richards makes of the difference between "imagination" and "fancy." The difference seems to lie in the *number* of "links of relevance between the units." A great number adds up to mutual modification (*Coleridge on Imagination*, pp. 78–9). Richards admits (p. 19) that he writes "as a Materialist trying to interpret . . . the utterances of an extreme Idealist." Cf. Wellek, in *Romantic Poets*, ed. T. M. Raysor (New York, 1950), p. 110. Both Coleridge and Wordsworth clearly insist in their main arguments that the difference between "imagination" and "fancy" is one "of kind."

[8] I, 15.

> tion consists in the excitement of surprise by the juxta-position and *apparent* reconciliation of widely different or incompatible things. As when, for instance, the hills are made to reflect the image of a *voice*. . . . this compulsory juxta-position is not produced by . . . any sympathy with the modifying powers with which the inner genius of the poet had united and inspirited all the objects of his thought . . . it is therefore a species of *wit*, a pure work of the *will*, and implies a leisure and self-possession both of thought and of feeling, incompatible with the steady fervor of a mind possessed and filled with the grandeur of its object.[9]

The truth is that romantic nature poems are all poems of a certain symbolic furniture and of a certain philosophy—the philosophy of immanence or pantheism which appears in Coleridge's *Aeolian Harp* and in Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*, and the related idealism of Coleridge's *Dejection*. For Coleridge, as for the Germans, there was a powerful temptation to equate philosophy and poetry. It is notorious that he proposed to write an essay on poetry which would "supersede all the books of metaphysics, and all the books of morals too." It would be in reality a "disguised system of morals and politics." [1] In his chapter of the *Biographia* on Shakespeare, he says, "No man was ever yet a great poet, without being at the same time a profound philosopher." [2] This was Coleridge's dabbling in that grandiose absorption of metaphysics into *Dichtung* and *Kunst*, or into a philosophy of these, such as we have noted among the Germans. The modern intuitional critic will object to this as an over-conceptualization of poetry.[3] The modern "Aristotelian" will say, in his own language, that such a theory of poetry is not a theory of the poetic object as something specifically different from anything else, that the theory deals only with the poetic process and furthermore assimilates this to metaphysics and to other non-poetic mental processes.[4] To which it may be added that Coleridge himself, in Chapter XIV of the *Biographia*, offers his own definition of the poem as a "composition" having "for its *immediate* object pleasure not truth," [5] but that

[9] II, 68.

[1] *Letters* (1895), I, 338, 347 (to Sir Humphry Davy, October 9, 1800, and February 3, 1801).

[2] Chapter XV (II, 19). Cf. Letter to Sotheby, September 10, 1802 (*Letters*, 1895, I, 4–3): Bowles "has no native passion because he is not a thinker."

[3] Cf. A. E. Powell, *The Romantic Theory of Poetry, An Examination in the Light of Croce's Aesthetic* (London, 1926), pp. 111, 117–21. A. C. Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (London, 1950), p. 172, makes the same case concerning Shelley.

[4] R. S. Crane, *et al.*, *Critics and Criticism* (Chicago, 1951), *passim*.

[5] Alba Warren, p. 133, cites the Victorian critic E. S. Dallas's appropriate observation that Coleridge's "pleasure" and "truth" are "objects" of two different orders, subjective and objective. It is scarcely possible to choose either one as an alternative to the other.

by this definition he would have had trouble discriminating between a poem by Wordsworth and one by Bowles. It was only when the general norms of content—passion and thought—were invoked that he could tell a good poem from a bad one.

A difficulty that has always been rather prominent for romantic scholarship lies in the fact that romantic poems do so pronouncedly *contain* and *assert* the philosophy of nature and of art which is supposedly also their formal principle. What the writers in the classical *Ars Poetica* tradition might try to do here and there, as in Pope's little series of handsprings on the theme of sound and sense, the romantic writers may approximate in a whole poem, and more subtly—and this, presumably, one would say they were led to do and were able to do because of the intimate union which they conceived to obtain between art and nature. The theory was endlessly reflexive and self-conscious. The assertion of the romantic poetics seems always to lurk not far from the embodiment in the poems and to be needed for the deciphering of the latter. Romantic poems tend to be about romantic imagination. Shelley's *West Wind* and Wordsworth's *Prelude* are triumphant instances of how the assertion may be dramatized and assimilated into structure. Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, which may be read as a poem about imagination, gets along with so little assertion that its theme has perhaps not even been suspected until very recently. The assertion (the content) of a poem is, however, never the same as the embodiment (the poem itself, the achievement), and the first never assures us of the second.

VI

A CONFUSION between poetic theory as operative in poems and poetic theory as their stated content is most often a feat of the historian and critic, rather than of the original theorist or the poet. Yet in his very bias toward illustrating a certain theory the poet-theorist may have done more mischief. The very division between fancy and imagination promoted by Wordsworth and Coleridge, though it was intended as a division between bad and good form in poetry, was responsible for a certain exclusiveness in their view of the thoughts and emotions (the range of psychological materials) which were available for poetry. Nothing too definite, nothing too precisely thoughtful (as tending toward mere scientific understanding), nothing too cool, too playful, too witty. Nothing too "metaphysical." Despite the sharp break with the 18th century which Wordsworth and Coleridge believed themselves to be making and which tradition has credited them with making, their theory of poetic imagination was on its genetic side a continuation of 18th-century "genius," and, with regard to the content of poetry, it prescribed certain items inherited

from the 18th-century reaction against metaphysical and neo-classic "wit." These items were the "sublime" and its components the emotive and the vague.

The repeated story of Coleridge at the waterfall[6] and his superior amusement at touristic confusions of the sublime, the beautiful, the pretty, and the picturesque, suggests a great concern to discriminate the "sublime" (in stricter 18th-century and Kantian fashion) from other departments of landscape and hence presumably from other departments of poetry. Yet, when discussing "imagination," both Wordsworth and Coleridge actually place either the "sublime," or its components the emotive and the vaguely grand, very near the center of the complex of qualities by which the imagination and hence poetry are defined.

> The grand storehouses of enthusiastic and meditative Imagination[7] . . . are the prophetic and lyrical parts of the Holy Scriptures, and the works of Milton; . . . . I select these writers in preference to those of ancient Greece and Rome, because the anthropomorphitism of the Pagan religion subjected the minds of the greatest poets in those countries too much to the bondage of definite form; from which the Hebrews were preserved by their abhorrence of idolatry. This abhorrence was almost as strong in our great epic Poet. . . . However imbued the surface might be with classical literature, he was a Hebrew in soul; and all things tended in him toward the sublime.[8]

The Longinianism of the following passage, though not explicit, will hardly be questioned.

> The Imagination also shapes and *Creates;* and how? By innumerable processes; and in none does it more delight than in that of consolidating numbers into unity, and dissolving and separating unity into numbers,—alternations proceeding from, and governed by, a sublime consciousness of the soul in her own mighty and almost divine powers.[9]

[6] The story appears four times in the works of Coleridge himself: *Coleridge's Shakespeare Criticism,* ed. T. M. Raysor (Cambridge, 1930), I, 182; II, 62–63, 352; and *Biographia,* ed. Shawcross, II, 225 (*Genial Criticism*); and once in the *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth,* ed. W. Knight (London, 1910), I, 195. In *Genial Criticism* Coleridge says the cataract is "in the strictest sense of the word, a sublime object." In Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journal* and in other versions he seems to consider the term "majestic" equally accurate. Cf. C. D. Thorpe, "Coleridge on the Sublime," in *Wordsworth and Coleridge, Studies in Honor of George M. Harper,* ed. Earl L. Griggs (Princeton, 1939), pp. 192–219.

[7] We omit the phrase ". . . of poetical, as contra-distinguished from human and dramatic Imagination," for we are not concerned to tax Wordsworth with this antithesis. "Of human and dramatic Imagination," he says, "the works of Shakespeare are an inexhaustible source."

[8] Preface to 1815, in *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism,* ed. N. C. Smith, p. 162.

[9] N. C. Smith, pp. 160–1. Cf. *Peri Hupsous,* Chapter XXIV: "The conversion of plurals into singulars sometimes conduces in a marked degree to elevation." Words-

In nothing did Wordsworth and Coleridge agree more wholeheartedly than in their association of the "imagination" with the vast, the infinite, the "shadowy ideal character." "Imagination recoils from everything but the plastic, the pliant, and the indefinite." [1] "Imagination [is given] to incite and support the eternal." "The Secondary Imagination . . . dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate." One receives the impression that the spiritual, the divine meaning at which they would get is something nearly identical with the generality, the abstraction. There is something much more Johnsonian here than one might have expected. This is one meaning of the statement sometimes encountered that Coleridge strove to unite with the "organic vitalism" of his day the "traditional rationalistic values of classicism." [2] Wordsworth's later conversations on the theme of imagination seem to have dwelt pretty heavily on "universal ideas or abstractions" embodied in "individual forms" or given a "local habitation." Crabb Robinson, one reporter of such conversations, adds:

> Wordsworth represented, much as unknown to him the German philosophers have done, that by the imagination the mere fact is exhibited in connection with infinity.[3]

That is, by universal ideas and abstractions, Wordsworth seemed to mean infinity. And for both Coleridge and Wordsworth infinity was not far from obscurity. Coleridge wished to habituate "the intellect to clear, distinct, and adequate conceptions concerning all things that are the possible objects of clear conception." But only in order to put these aside and hence be able

> to reserve the deep feelings which belong, as by a natural right to those obscure ideas that are necessary to the moral perfection

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worth knew both Longinus and his English counterpart John Dennis (*Correspondence of Crabb Robinson with the Wordsworth Circle*, ed. E. Morley, I, 78; undated letter to Southey in N. C. Smith, p. 224). DeQuincey reports that both Wordsworth and Coleridge "had an absurd 'craze' about" Dennis (*Critical Works of Dennis*, ed. E. N. Hooker, II, lxxiii). For the literalness with which Wordsworth pursued this notion of numbers consolidated into unity, see not only the examples from Milton following the passage of the 1815 Preface just quoted but his *Letter to Lady Beaumont*, 1817, defending his sonnet "With ships the sea was sprinkled far and nigh" ("The mind can have no rest among a multitude of objects" . . .), and his "forty feeding like one" ("Written in March," 1802); cf. DeQuincey's comment, concerning "sublime unity," in his essay "On Wordsworth's Poetry," *Tait's Magazine*, September, 1845 (Alden, pp. 336–7).

[1] "You will know that you are dealing with imagination when the edges of things begin to waver and fade out" (F. A. Pottle, "The Eye and the Object in the Poetry of Wordsworth," in *Wordsworth, Centenary Studies*, ed. Gilbert T. Dunklin, Princeton, 1951, p. 38).

[2] W. J. Bate, in *Perspectives of Criticism*, ed. Harry Levin (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), p. 154.

[3] Extracts from Crabb Robinson's *Diary*, 1815 and 1816, quoted by Shawcross, *Biographia Literaria*, I, 227–8.

> of the human being, notwithstanding, yea, even in consequence, of their obscurity—to reserve these feelings, I repeat, for objects, which their very sublimity renders indefinite, no less than their indefiniteness renders them sublime: namely, to the ideas of being, form, life, the reason, the law of conscience, freedom, immortality, God! [4]

The 18th-century notion of sublimity as a subjective experience of genius had gotten along well enough with the emerging principle of association by emotive congruity. The latter principle was so well installed in critical thinking by the time of Wordsworth and Coleridge that they could hardly have avoided taking advantage of it. It is true that they did this with delicacy. Wordsworth in his 1800 Preface, after twice invoking the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," adds the tempering phrase "emotion recollected in tranquility," [5] and he touches the same note in his verse.

> And *then* my heart with pleasure fills
> And dances with the daffodils.
>
> The music in my heart I bore
> Long after it was heard no more.

In one of his later letters he professes: "I have never given way to my own feelings in personifying natural objects without bringing all that I have said to a rigorous after-test of good sense." [6] Like the Germans, both Wordsworth and Coleridge must be largely exculpated as transmitters of 18th-century sentimentalism. Nevertheless the critical theory of each contains some striking statements of the emotive principle. Thus in the 1800 preface:

> Another circumstance must be mentioned which distinguishes these Poems from the popular Poetry of the day; it is this, that the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling.[7]

"The appropriate business of poetry, . . ." he says later, "and her *duty*, is to treat of things not as they *are*, but as they *appear;* not as they exist in themselves, but as they *seem* to exist to the senses, and to the *passions*." [8] "You feel strongly," he writes to a minor poet; "trust to

[4] *The Friend*, I. Essays: Introductory, Essay XIV (London: Bohn's Standard Library, 1906, p. 66).

[5] N. C. Smith, pp. 15, 34.

[6] Letter to W. R. Hamilton, December 23, 1829, *Letters . . . Later Years*, I, 436–7.

[7] N. C. Smith, p. 16.

[8] *Essay Supplementary to the Preface*, 1815 (N. C. Smith, p. 169).

those feelings, and your poem will take its shape and proportions as a tree does from the vital principle that actuates it." [9]

And Coleridge:

> Association depends in a much greater degree on the recurrence of resembling states of feeling than trains of ideas. . . . A metaphysical solution [like Hartley's] that does not instantly tell you something in the heart is grievously to be suspected. . . . I almost think that ideas never recall ideas, any more than leaves in a forest create each other's motion. The breeze it is runs thro' them—it is the soul or state of feeling. If I had said no one idea ever recalls another, I am confident that I could support the assertion.[1]

What first struck Coleridge about Wordsworth's poetry was

> the union of deep feeling with profound thought . . . and above all the original gift of spreading the tone, the atmosphere and with it the depth and height of the ideal world. . . .[2]

And apropos of Shakespeare:

> Images become proofs of original genius only so far as they are modified by a predominant passion.[3]

He speaks of "modifying a series of thoughts by some one predominant thought or feeling." In the preceding chapter, his phrase is "a tone and spirit of unity." [4] In his dramatic criticism, Coleridge likes to speak about the ruling passion of a character (Capulet or Lear), and, like A. W. Schlegel, he replaces the old unities of time, space, and action by a "unity of interest." [5]

If the Wordsworthian formula "emotion recollected in tranquillity" be taken in an approximately hylo-morphic way, one may suppose that "emotion" refers to a kind of poetic content, and tranquil "recollection" to the control or shaping of this content—the formal poetic principle. In the Coleridgean formulas which we have just quoted, however, the emphasis is reversed. Emotion appears, or attempts to appear, as the organizing principle. The difference is crucial. As organization is a form of intelligibility, it is a basic question of poetic theory whether in fact

[9] *Letters . . . Later Years*, I, 537.
[1] Letter to Southey, August 7, 1803 (*Letters*, 1895, I, 428).
[2] *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter IV (I, 59).
[3] *Biographia*, Chapter XV (II, 16).
[4] *Biographia*, II, 12.
[5] *Shakespearean Criticism*, ed. T. M. Raysor, I, 50, 212–13, 216; II, 73–4, 131. Cf. *post* Chapter 20, E. A. Poe. Both in the *Biographia* and throughout his Shakespearian criticism Coleridge connects poetical figures and meter closely with strong passion. See *Shakespearean Criticism*, I, 96, 206, 209, 218; II, 78, 103.

emotion as such can become the formal or organizing principle of a poem without the disappearance of the principle.

SUPPLEMENT

Nor should this, perchance,
Pass unrecorded, that I still had loved
The exercise and produce of a toil,
Than analytic industry to me
More pleasing, and whose character I deem
Is more poetic as resembling more
Creative agency. The song would speak
Of that interminable building reared
By observation of affinities
In objects where no brotherhood exists
To passive minds. My seventeenth year was come
And, whether from this habit rooted now
So deeply in my mind, or from excess
In the great social principle of life
Coercing all things into sympathy,
To unorganic natures were transferred
My own enjoyments; or the power of truth
Coming in revelation, did converse
With things that really are; I, at this time,
Saw blessings spread around me like a sea.
Thus while the days flew by, and years passed on,
From Nature and her overflowing soul,
I had received so much, that all my thoughts
Were steeped in feeling; I was only then
Contented, when with bliss ineffable
I felt the sentiment of Being spread
O'er all that moves and all that seemeth still;
O'er all that, lost beyond the reach of thought
And human knowledge, to the human eye
Invisible, yet liveth to the heart;
O'er all that leaps and runs, and shouts and sings,
Or beats the gladsome air; o'er all that glides
Beneath the wave, yea, in the wave itself,
And mighty depth of waters. Wonder not
If high the transport, great the joy I felt,
Communing in this sort through earth and heaven
With every form of creature, as it looked
Towards the Uncreated with a countenance
Of adoration, with an eye of love.
One song they sang, and it was audible,

Most audible, then, when the fleshly ear,
O'ercome by humblest prelude of that strain,
Forgot her functions, and slept undisturbed.

—William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1850), II, 376–418.

Next, in the serpent we approach the source of a group of myths, world-wide, founded on great and common human instincts, respecting which I must note one or two points which bear intimately on all our subject. For it seems to me that the scholars who are at present occupied in interpretation of human myths have most of them forgotten that there are any such things as natural myths; and that the dark sayings of men may be both difficult to read, and not always worth reading; but the dark sayings of nature will probably become clearer for the looking into, and will very certainly be worth reading. And, indeed, all guidance to the right sense of the human and variable myths will probably depend on our first getting at the sense of the natural and invariable ones. The dead hieroglyph may have meant this or that—the living hieroglyph means always the same; but remember, it is just as much a hieroglyph as the other; nay, more—a "sacred or reserved sculpture," a thing with an inner language. The serpent crest of the king's crown, or of the god's, on the pillars of Egypt, is a mystery; but the serpent itself, gliding past the pillar's foot, is it less a mystery? Is there, indeed, no tongue, except the mute forked flash from its lips in that running brook of horror on the ground.

—John Ruskin, *The Queen of the Air*, Lecture II

The fancy sees the outside, and is able to give a portrait of the outside, clear, brilliant, and full of detail.

The imagination sees the heart and inner nature, and makes them felt, but is often obscure, mysterious, and interrupted, in its giving of outer detail. . . . hear Hamlet:

> Here hung those lips that I have kissed, I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now, your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar.

There is the essence of lip, and the full power of the imagination. . . . In Milton it happens, I think, generally . . . that the imagination is mixed and broken with fancy, and so the strength of the imagery is part of iron and part of clay:

Bring the rathe primrose, that forsaken dies,	*Imagination.*
The tufted crow-toe and pale jessamine,	*Nugatory.*
The white pink, and the pansy freaked with jet,	*Fancy.*
The glowing violet,	*Imagination.*
The musk rose, and the well-attired woodbine,	*Fancy*, vulgar.
With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,	*Imagination.*
And every flower that sad embroidery wears.	*Mixed.*

—John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, Volume II (1846), Section II, Chapter iii

Pope starts with an abstraction or a generalization concerning human nature and then looks for a correlative in the world of nature apart from man. His habit of observation of external nature is not detailed and precise; indeed, he thinks it unimportant whether the "facts" of nature which he alleges in his illustrations are really facts or superstitions. The natural history of Pliny and the old bestiaries are as much grist to his mill as the latest papers of the Royal Society. He appears also to me to have at times no clear, detailed, and consistent mental picture of his own figures. To illustrate: in the couplet near the beginning of the *Essay on Man*,

> The latent tracts, the giddy heights explore
> Of all who blindly creep or sightless soar,

he means, I suppose, moles and birds of some sort. . . . he appears to be making use of the ancient and medieval notion that all birds except the eagle blind themselves by looking at the sun. Surely, by Pope's time it was generally known that the high-flying birds are not "sightless"; that on the contrary they have telescopic vision. . . . Or consider a famous passage from the Second Dialogue of the *Epilogue to the Satires* . . . :

> Ye tinsel Insects! whom a Court maintains,
> That count your Beauties only by your Stains,
> Spin all your Cobwebs o'er the Eye of Day!
> The Muse's wing shall brush you all away. 220–23

"Tinsel" to me means "shining or glittering like cheap metal foil," and my natural image of a "tinsel insect" would be some kind of beetle ("this Bug with gilded wings"). But the word can mean no more than "pretentiously showy" and so may not have been intended to identify the kind of insect Pope has in mind. "Stains," however, can hardly mean anything else than moths or butterflies ("Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes, As are the tiger-moth's deep-damask'd wings"). But the trouble with that is that Pope's insects spin cobwebs, which no butterfly or moth can do. I think we shall do Pope no injustice if we conclude that his insects have the combined characteristics of beetles, moths, and spiders, and hence do not belong to any order known to naturalists. . . .

May I remind the reader again that this essay is descriptive, not judicial? Wordsworth is right in maintaining that many of Pope's images are "false" from the naturalistic point of view, but I should be willing to argue that they are appropriate for the kind of poetry Pope was writing. In the metaphor just discussed, a general idea of insect-ness is what Pope wants, and he can produce it better by eclecticism than by sharp individuation.

—Frederick A. Pottle, "The Eye and the Object in the Poetry of Wordsworth," in *Wordsworth, Centenary Studies Presented at Cornell and Princeton Universities*, ed. Gilbert T. Dunklin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), pp. 34–6. The essay is copyrighted 1950 by Yale University Press.

CHAPTER 19

PEACOCK VS. SHELLEY: RHAPSODIC DIDACTICISM

§ *romantic theory vs. rationalism, Coleridge and Wordsworth, hopes for reunion, "false secondary power," English empirical and utilitarian philosophy, decline in prestige of poetry (Sprat, Diderot), poetry as "magic," as painting, as insanity (Macaulay), poetry useless (Bentham)—II.* Peacock's Four Ages: *superficially cyclic, assault on Lake School, modern primitivism, bumptious rhetoric, Shelley's retort, "Reason" and "Imagination," echoes of Plato, Shelley's early naturalism, later idealism, ontologic and epistemologic, plastic power of poetry, an enthusiastic celebration (anthology of passages from* Defense), *parallels in* Ode to the West Wind, *romantic* Ars Poetica, *emphasis on moral power, similarity to Sidney, profound difference, Aristotle vs. Kant, imagination the absolute—III. Blake, apocalyptic humanism, a literalist of the imagination, Wordsworth's error, outward creation as dirt—IV. international events, social and economic pressures, popular reversion to classical notions, religious and patriotic reviewing, contrast to didacticism of revolution, summary: poetic autonomy during the 18th century, hedonistic direction, romantic theory more ambiguous, 19th-century dual continuation in England: art for art's sake, new didacticisms, rhapsodic and classical, atmospheric influence of Kant—V. De Quincey, journalistic flourishes on Germanic themes, "The Poetry of Pope" (1848), "literature of knowledge," "literature of power," Carlyle, early essays, on poetry and science, enfeeblement of poetry, true poet as visionary,* On Heroes. . . *(1840), from divinity to poet, poet as universal Great Man, generals as poets, Plato's* Ion *again* §

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THE GERMAN AND ENGLISH ROMANTICISM WHICH WE HAVE SEEN IN our last two chapters was a late reaction, or a slowly reached culmination of reactionary trends, against the claims of scientific rationalism which had begun to show strength during the latter 17th century. The attitude of protest against scientific encroachment which we illustrated by a passage from Novalis might have been noted too in Wordsworth and Coleridge. The passage in Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* on the subject of "understanding" associates this lower faculty quite clearly with geometrical, mechanical, and other abstractively scientific modes of thought. In other places Coleridge shared with German Nature philosophers the pious hope that science might some day graduate from its mechanistic bent and become reconcilable with an aesthetic view of the world. Wordsworth's best known thought upon the subject appears in the passage of his 1802 Preface where he laments the contemporary separation of science from everyday life and its consequent repugnance to poetry, but allows himself the hope that at some future day a reunion all round may occur.[1] Wordsworth's allusion, in the *Prelude*, to the abstractive reason as a "false secondary power by which we multiply distinctions" and his lyric phrase "meddling intellect" are also well known.[2] But less well known is the completeness with which he could apply these notions to science—as in his later allusion to the "dull eye, dull and inanimate" of science,[3] and his reported remark that science "waged war with and wished to extinguish Imagination," and that he would much rather be a "superstitious old woman" than a scientist ignorant of theology.[4]

It was not as if Wordsworth and Coleridge were engaged with windmills. True, the scientists and inventors of the age were more intent on making discoveries about electricity and steam than on disparaging poetry. The German metaphysicians and aestheticians radiated an authoritative encouragement in the direction of the poetic endeavor. Deep in the mind of the age, however, and solidly settled lay the heritage of the enlightenment—a good hardpan of complacency about the advances of science and its extensive promises. The ideas of German philosophers which invaded England found the ideas of native utilitarian philosophers like Bentham and James Mill very firmly and respectably in possession.

Exhortations by earlier empirical philosophers about what *ought* to be the effect of science on poetry had passed during the latter 17th and

[1] Cf. D. G. James, *Scepticism and Poetry* (London, 1937), p. 167. "Such a transfiguration," says James, "is as undesirable as it is impossible, an absurd fiction created for an eloquent argument."

[2] *Prelude*, II, 214–17; *The Tables Turned*, in *Lyrical Ballads*.

[3] *Excursion* IV, 124–5.

[4] R. P. Graves, *Life of William Hamilton* (Dublin, 1882–89), I, 313. The remark is dated August, 1829.

18th centuries, especially among the French, into announcements, more often with a tone of congratulation than with one of regret, that the effect was in the process of being accomplished.[5] Sprat, for instance, in his *History of the Royal Society*, 1672, had described poetry as a technique of primitive pedagogy, now outmoded. "When the Fabulous Age was past, philosophy took a little more Courage; and ventured to rely upon its own strength, without the assistance of Poetry."[6] Fontenelle, in his *Traité de la Poésie en Général* (written apparently in the last quarter of the 17th century though not published until 1751), was well content to witness the end of the age of fable and the retirement of nature and emotion (the essentials of poetry) before the march of civilization. And Diderot in his *Salon de 1767:*

> Poetry always contains a pinch of untruth. The philosophic spirit gives us the habit of noting this untruth, and goodbye poetic illusion, goodbye poetic effect.[7]

In England the idea that poetry is magic might seem during the 18th century a comfortable one, a sufficient compliment to poetry.

> True Poesy is *magic*, not nature; an effect from causes hidden or unknown.[8]

The extent to which this idea is susceptible of a patronizing interpretation—and at the same time the deliquescence of another 18th-century idea, *poesis* as *pictura*—may be observed in the following remarkable passage occurring near the outset of Macaulay's essay on Milton, 1825.

> Perhaps no person can be a poet, or can even enjoy poetry, without a certain unsoundness of mind, if anything which gives so much pleasure ought to be called unsoundness. . . . By poetry we mean the art of employing words in such a manner as to produce an illusion in the imagination, the art of doing by means of words what the painter does by means of colours. . . . Truth, indeed, is essential to poetry; but it is the truth of madness. The reasonings are just; but the premises are false. After the first

[5] The theme appears of course even in classical times. Cf. Atkins, II, 323, on Plutarch's *Why the Pythia does not now give Oracles in Verse*, 406 E. "So, as language also underwent a change and put off its finery, history descended from its vehicle of versification, and went on foot in prose, whereby the truth was mostly sifted from the fabulous. Philosophy welcomed clearness and teachability in preference to creating amazement, and pursued its investigations through the medium of everyday language" (Plutarch's *Moralia*, trans. F. C. Babbitt, vol. V, London, 1936).

[6] *History of the Royal Society of London* (London, 1722), p. 6.

[7] "*Il y a dans la poésie toujours un peu de mensonge. L'esprit philosophique nous habitue à le discerner; et adieu l'illusion et l'effet*" (*Oeuvres*, ed. Tourneur-Assézat, XI, 136).

[8] Maurice Morgann, *Essay of the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff*, ed. W. A. Gill (London, 1912), p. 70.

> suppositions have been made, everything ought to be consistent; but those first suppositions require a degree of credulity which almost amounts to a partial and temporary derangement of the intellect. Hence of all people children are the most imaginative. They abandon themselves without reserve to every illusion. . . . Such is the despotism of the imagination over uncultivated minds.
>
> In a rude state of society men are children with a greater variety of ideas. It is . . . in such a state of society that one may expect to find the poetical temperament in its highest perfection. In an enlightened age there will be much intelligence, much science, much philosophy, abundance of just classification and subtle analysis, abundance of wit and eloquence, abundance of verses, and even of good ones; but little poetry. Men will judge and compare; but they will not create. They will talk about the old poets, and comment on them, and to a certain degree enjoy them. But they will scarcely be able to conceive the effect which poetry produced on their ruder ancestors, the agony; the ecstasy, the plenitude of belief. The Greek Rhapsodists, according to Plato, could scarce recite Homer without falling into convulsions. The Mohawk hardly feels the scalping knife while he shouts his death-song. The power which the ancient bards of Wales and Germany exercised over their auditors seems to modern readers almost miraculous. Such feelings are very rare in a civilized community, and most rare among those who participate most in its improvements. They linger longest amongst the peasantry.
>
> Poetry produces an illusion on the eye of the mind, as a magic lantern produces an illusion on the eye of the body. And, as the magic lantern acts best in a dark room, poetry affects its purpose most completely in a dark age.[9]

Poetry in brief is a combination of painting and insanity. In the same spirit and with even more authority Bentham was plastering the arts with the epithets *anergastic* (no-work-producing) and *aplopathoscopic* (mere-sensation-regarding). "The game of push-pin," he said, "is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry." [1]

[9] Macaulay's review of Milton's *De Doctrina Christiana*, August, 1825, paragraphs 14–17 (*Essays*, Everyman's Library, 1907, I, 154–5). Cf. Hazlitt's opinion that the "Necessary advances of civilization are unfavorable to the spirit of poetry" (*Works*, ed. P. P. Howe, V, 9) and that the "greatest poets, the best painters, appeared soon after the birth" of the technological arts "and lived in a state of society, which was, in other respects, comparatively barbarous" (*Works*, IV, 161). Cf. "The Age of Brass," *TLS*, August 11, 1950, p. 50.

[1] Alba Warren, *English Poetic Theory 1825–1865* (Princeton, 1950), pp. 66–7.

II

MACAULAY's too, too solid comment is a serious counterpart to a more notorious, if only whimsical, essay which had appeared five years earlier. This was *The Four Ages of Poetry*, by Shelley's friend the neo-pagan satirical novelist Thomas Love Peacock. Aside from the fact that it is the most sustained account in English of the conflict between poetry and science as it stood in the era of the romantic poets, Peacock's essay is notable for two things: a superficially cyclic account of the history of culture and poetry, and springing out of that a triumphantly unfair assault on contemporary English poetry, especially that of the Lake School. The four ages of poetry in the antique world were, says Peacock, the iron age (when poetry was rude panegyric of rude but real heroes), the golden age from Homer to Sophocles (when poetry was ancestral retrospect—the infancy of history), the silver age of civilization (when poetry was either heroic imitation, the epic of Virgil, or social criticism, the comedy of Aristophanes, the satire of Horace), and the brass age, the second childhood of poetry (a degenerate attempt to regain the primitive). The cause of the steady deterioration of poetry in the ancient world had been the rise of historical and philosophic thinking. First the empire of fact, then the empire of thought had been withdrawn. In the modern world, a second four-phase cycle had occurred: the age of medieval romance, the age of Ariosto and Shakespeare, the age of Dryden and Pope, and now the latest and most ridiculous phase in the history of poetry, that of modern primitivism, the second age of brass, the "patriarchs" of which appear in that "egregious confraternity of rhymesters . . . the lake Poets."

> While the historian and the philosopher are advancing in, and accelerating, the progress of knowledge, the poet is wallowing in the rubbish of departed ignorance, and raking up the ashes of dead savages to find gewgaws and rattles for the grown babies of the age. Mr. Scott digs up the poachers and cattle-stealers of the ancient border. Lord Byron cruises for thieves and pirates on the shores of the Morea and among the Greek islands. Mr. Southey wades through ponderous volumes of travels and old chronicles, from which he carefully selects all that is fake, useless, and absurd, as being essentially poetical; and when he has a commonplace book full of monstrosities, strings them into an epic. Mr. Wordsworth picks up village legends from old women and sextons; and Mr. Coleridge, to the valuable information acquired from similar sources, superadds the dreams of crazy theologians and the mysticism of German metaphysics, and favors

> the world with visions in verse, in which the quadruple elements of sexton, old woman, Jeremy Taylor, and Immanuel Kant are harmonized into a delicious poetical compound.
>
> A poet in our times is a semi-barbarian in a civilized community. He lives in the days that are past. His ideas, thoughts, feelings, associations, are all with barbarous manners, obsolete customs, and exploded superstitions. The march of his intellect is like that of a crab, backward.
>
> . . . as if there were no such things in existence as mathematicians, astronomers, chemists, moralists, metaphysicians, historians, politicians, and political economists, who have built into the upper air of intelligence a pyramid, from the summit of which they see the modern Parnassus far beneath them, and, knowing how small a place it occupies in the comprehensiveness of their prospect, smile at the little ambition and the circumscribed perceptions with which the drivelers and mountebanks upon it are contending for the poetical palm and the critical chair.[2]

Peacock's waggishly provocative and bumptious rhetoric gives a vivid enough image of a closing phase in the long process by which the four ages, golden, silver, iron, brazen, of classical myth,[3] were settling into the three (theological, metaphysical, scientific) of 19th-century Comtean positivism. Except for the transvaluation, the accent of rejoicing rather than lament as science is supposed to deprive poetry of its dominion, this evolutionary account of poetic and cultural origins is the same as that which appears in Vico, in the Germans from Herder on, in Rousseau, and in 18th-century British primitivists like Monboddo and John Brown. And substantially the same account appears in the excited retort which Peacock elicited from Shelley.[4]

Shelley's *Defense of Poetry* [5] is not remarkable for metaphysical pre-

[2] Text in P. B. Shelley, *A Defense of Poetry*, ed. A. S. Cook (Boston, 1891), pp. 47–61; available also in *Peacock's Four Ages of Poetry, Shelley's Defense of Poetry, Browning's Essay on Shelley*, ed. H. F. B. Brett-Smith (Oxford, 1945).

[3] Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I, 89–127. *Aurea prima sata est aetas. . . . subiit argentea proles, auro deterior. . . . Tertia post illas successit aënea proles. . . . duro est ultima ferro.*

[4] Professor Wellek points out that Shelley's immediate source appears to be French. Shelley speaks of the "Celtic" conquerors of the Roman Empire and the predominance of the "Celtic" nations after the fall of Rome. Such a confusion between Celtic and Teutonic occurs in Paul-Henri Mallet, the Swiss propagandist of things Nordic, and among the Celtomanes of the late 18th century, but in English it had been refuted by Bishop Percy, the translator of Mallet (René Wellek, "DeQuincey's Status in the History of Ideas," *PQ*, XXIII, July, 1944, 267).

[5] It was finished and sent to Charles Ollier (the publisher of Peacock's *Four Ages*) by March 20, 1821. With the failure of Ollier's *Miscellany* and then of Hunt's *Liberal*, to which the manuscript had been transferred, it was not published until 1840, in Mrs. Shelley's volume of *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations, and*

cision. The opening paragraph expounds a distinction between "Reason" (Coleridgean "Understanding") and "Imagination" (Coleridgean "Secondary Imagination" plus Coleridgean "Reason") along lines so simple as to be almost reminiscent of 17th-century arguments about "judgment" and "wit." [6] The essay contains two or three fairly close echoes of Plato's *Ion* and *Symposium*, both of which Shelley had been recently translating. The most significant of these passages (though Shelley's echo brings over nothing of the jocular spirit by which the words of Socrates in the *Ion* are protected) is perhaps the following:

> The sacred links of that chain have never been entirely disjoined, which descending through the minds of many men is attached to those great minds, whence as from a magnet the invisible effluence is sent forth, which at once connects, animates, and sustains the life of all.[7]

The general course of Shelley's philosophic career had been from French naturalism and necessitarianism (*Queen Mab*,[8] 1813), through a phase of Platonic or ontologic idealism [9] (perhaps more Wordsworthian than actually philosophic—*Mont Blanc* and the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, 1816) to the psychologic or epistemologic idealism (more characteristic of his era) in the *Poems* of 1822.

> Thought
> Alone, and its quick elements, Will, Passion,
> Reason, Imagination, cannot die;
> They are, what that which they regard appears,
> The stuff whence mutability can weave
> All that it hath dominion o'er, worlds, worms,
> Empires, and superstitions.[1]

Fragments. In being edited for the *Liberal*, the essay was pruned of its direct references to Peacock.

[6] Cf. *Defense*, ed. Cook, p. 35. Reason is the "calculating faculty."

[7] "This is the language of Plato" (Shelley, at bottom of folio MS. d1. See A. H. Koszul, *Shelley's Prose in the Bodleian Manuscripts*, London, 1910, p. 88, n. 3). Shelley's translation of the corresponding passage in the *Ion* runs as follows: ". . . it is a divine influence which moves you, like that which resides in the stone called magnet by Euripides, and Heraclea by the people. . . . Do you not perceive that your auditor is the last link of that chain which I have described as held together through the power of the magnet. . . ." (*Essays, Letters . . .* 1840, I, 281). In his Preface to the *Symposium* Shelley says that he translated this dialogue from the 9th to the 17th of July, 1818. The only evidence for the date of his translating the *Ion* is a letter to Peacock, February 15, 1821, in which he alludes to reading it.

[8] Of course not *simply* a naturalistic poem. See *Queen Mab*, VI, 32 ff., where "soul" is the only element.

[9] On the sources of Shelley's Platonism, see James A. Notopoulos, "Shelley and Thomas Taylor," *PMLA*, LI (July, 1936), 502–17; *The Platonism of Shelley* (Durham, 1949), pp. 29–77, Ch. III, "The Direct Platonism of Shelley."

[1] *Hellas*, ll. 795–801. Cf. especially *Epipsychidion* and *Adonais*. In her Preface to the 1840 volumes of Shelley's prose Mrs. Shelley became authority for the notion that "Shelley was a disciple of the Immaterial Philosophy of Berkeley." And it is

It would be difficult to show that any one of these philosophies operates decisively in the poetics of the *Defense*, or that any is altogether absent. Even French naturalism may be said to be represented in the conception of poetic origins to which we have alluded just above. Strains of 18th-century primitivism mingle throughout with a Germanically colored romantic excitement about the immediately spiritual and morally plastic power of the poet.

> The savage (for the savage is to ages what the child is to years) expresses the emotions produced in him by surrounding objects in a similar manner; and language and gesture, together with plastic or pictorial imitation, become the image of the combined effect of those objects and his apprehension of them. Man in society, with all his passions and his pleasures, next becomes the object of the passions and pleasures of man; an additional class of emotions produces an augmented treasure of expression; and language, gesture, and the imitative arts, become at once the representation and the medium, the pencil and the picture, the chisel and the statue, the chord and the harmony.—p. 3
>
> Their language is vitally metaphorical; that is, it marks the before unapprehended relations of things and perpetuates their apprehension.—p. 4
>
> But poets, or those who imagine and express this indestructible order, are not only the authors of language and of music, of the dance, and architecture, and statuary, and painting; they are the institutors of laws, and the founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life, and the teachers who draw into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and the true that partial apprehension of the agencies of the invisible world which is called religion.—p. 5

. . .

---

true that Shelley seems to have picked up a good deal of whatever philosophy he had from Sir William Drummond's Berkeleyan handbook of modern philosophy, *Academical Questions* (London, 1805). Yet in one of the few scraps of direct evidence which Shelley left, his fragmentary essay or jottings *On Life*, he follows a Berkeleyan phrase "Nothing exists but as it is perceived" in the same paragraph with the Fichtean monistic pronouncement "The words *I, YOU, THEY*, . . . are merely marks employed to denote the different modifications of the one mind" (*Shelley's Literary and Philosophical Criticism*, ed. John Shawcross, London, 1909, p. 56). See Joseph Barrell, *Shelley and the Thought of his Time* (New Haven, 1947), p. 122, n. 50; cf. pp. 28, 160, 197. And see G. S. Brett, "Shelley's Relation to Berkeley and Drummond," *Studies in English by Members of University College* (Toronto, Canada, 1931); Hans Liedtke, *Shelley durch Berkeley und Drummond beeinflusst* (Greifswald, 1933). Shelley apparently never read Kant. Barrell believes that Drummond taught both Shelley and Peacock (in *Nightmare Abbey*) to scorn the Critical Philosophy. Cf. René Wellek, *Immanuel Kant in England 1793–1838* (Princeton, 1931), pp. 181–2.

> Poetry in a more restricted sense expresses those arrangements of language, and especially metrical language, which are created by that imperial faculty whose throne is curtained within the invisible nature of man. And this springs from the nature itself of language, which is a more direct representation of the actions and passions of our internal being, and is susceptible of more various and delicate combinations, than color, form, or motion, and is more plastic and obedient to the control of that faculty of which it is the creation.—pp. 6–7

What is unique about the essay, and wherein it triumphs, is the overall rhythm of its enthusiasm and the glowing cascade of images which celebrate the magnificent theme.

> Man is an instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven, like the alternations of an ever-changing wind over an Aeolian lyre, which move it by their motion to ever-changing melody.—p. 2

> . . . the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the color of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. Could this influence be durable in its original purity and force, it is impossible to predict the greatness of the results; but when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet.—p. 39

> Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds. We are aware of evanescent visitations of thought and feeling. . . . It is as it were the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own.—p. 40

> Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man.—p. 41

> It strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty which is the spirit of its forms. —p. 42

> The most unfailing herald, companion, and follower of the awakening of a great people to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution, is poetry.—pp. 45–6

> Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.—p. 46 [2]

Shelley's *Defense* is written in the vein of his *Ode to the West Wind*, a poem which is a plenary instance of the romantic *Ars Poetica*, where overt enunciation of the cosmic and daemonic poetics is not only supported by imagery but is merged in tumultuous swirls of it and carried in headlong versification.

> Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
> What if my leaves are falling like its own!
> The tumult of thy mighty harmonies
>
> Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
> Sweet though in sadness.[3] Be thou, Spirit fierce,
> My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!
>
> Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
> Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!
> And, by the incantation of this verse,
>
> Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
> Ashes and sparks,[4] my words among mankind!
> Be through my lips to unwakened earth
> The trumpet of a prophecy! [5]

[2] "Earlier laudators of poetry had said the same thing, but it did not mean the same thing; Shelley (to borrow a successful phrase from Mr. Bernard Shaw) was the first, in this tradition of Nature's M.P.'s" (Eliot, *Use of Poetry*, p. 16).

[3] Cf. *Defense*, ed. Cook, p. 35: "Sorrow, terror, anguish, despair itself, are often the chosen expressions of an approximation to the highest good. . . . tragedy delights by affording a shadow of that pleasure which exists in pain. This is the source also of the melancholy which is inseparable from the sweetest melody."

[4] Cf. *Defense*, ed. Cook, p. 11, "a spark of inextinguishable thought"; p. 33, "a spark, a burning atom of inextinguishable thought."

[5] Strains of Shelley's poetic theory, especially in its political and moral aspects, occur throughout his poetry—in *Queen Mab* and *Prometheus*, for instance, in *Mont Blanc*, the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, the *Ode to Naples*, the *Ode to Liberty*. Cf. Melvin Solve, *Shelley, His Theory of Poetry* (Chicago, 1927), pp. 32 ff.

The "undisciplined overflowing of the soul," the "attempt to imitate the untamable wildness" (Preface to Shelley's *History of a Six Weeks Tour*, 1817) which we encounter in this poetry of Shelley's presents a nice problem concerning the formal (i.e., ordered) embodiment of tumult in poetry. As for the genetic question, Shelley speaks against deliberate art in the *Defense* ("I appeal to the greatest poets of the present day whether it is not an error to assert that the finest passages of poetry are produced by labor and study," p. 39). But his record here is not consistent. In the Preface to *Prometheus*, for instance, he confesses that the finest passages of the poem have been the product of laborious revision. Cf. *ante* Chapter 10, p. 181, the relation between genesis and product, ordered or disordered, in the context of Jonson's classical views.

The most definable theoretic tenet in all this looks much like a renewal of one of those practical functions defined in Ciceronian rhetoric, to "persuade" (*persuadere, flectere*). Shelley's emphasis is quite clear.

> A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause. Poetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight. . . . Poetry strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man.—p. 14

> The imagination is enlarged by a sympathy with pains and passions so mighty, that they distend in their conception the capacity of that by which they are conceived; the good affections are strengthened by pity, indignation, terror and sorrow, and an exalted calm is prolonged from the satiety of this high exercise of them into the tumult of familiar life.—p. 18

As Sir Philip Sidney had said, poetry is a feigning "notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with . . . delightful teaching." Poetry combines the truths of philosophy with the persuasive vividness of history. How, one might be tempted to ask, does Shelley's *Defense* differ from Sidney's? A number of close parallels may be noted. The term "poet," say both Sidney and Shelley, is derived from the verb "to make" (*poiein*); poets are the earliest authors; they are teachers of religion and prophets (or are "called" prophets, as Sidney puts it). Poetry is rhythmic, but rhyming and versification do not make a poet. Aristotle has defined the difference between poetry and history. But great historians and philosophers (the philosopher Plato, for instance) have been poets. A few of Sidney's phrases—"Plannet-like Musick," "low-creeping" objections to poetry—are reborn in Shelley's "planetary music" of poetry and "low-thoughted envy" of contemporaries.[6] The difference between the two *Defenses*, nevertheless, could scarcely be more profound. It lies as deep as the difference between Aristotle and Kant. It amounts to this: that Sidney in all his talking about the teaching and persuading power of poetry would never dream that poetry was teaching or persuading any doctrine which it did not discover in some legislatively competent authority outside itself, either scriptural revelation or ethical philosophy. With Shelley just the opposite is true. When he talks about poetry getting at the motives for good action, touching the heart by enkindling the im-

[6] See *Defense*, ed. Cook, p. xix; ed. H. F. B. Brett-Smith, p. xx.

agination, he may sound for a moment almost pre-Cartesian, forensic, homiletic. The words are, nevertheless, part of an appeal for a vastly creative and autonomous power. There is no appeal to any other authority. The limits of the power come not from outside it but from within. Or, there are no limits. There is no specifically doctrinal commitment. Thus:

> A poet therefore would do ill to embody his own conceptions of right and wrong, which are usually those of his place and time, in his poetical creations, which participate in neither. By this assumption of the inferior office of interpreting the effect, in which perhaps after all he might acquit himself but imperfectly, he would resign a glory in the participation of the cause. —p. 14

> Milton has so far violated the popular creed (if this shall be judged to be a violation) as to have alleged no superiority of moral virtue to his God over his Devil. And this bold neglect of a direct moral purpose is the most decisive proof of the supremacy of Milton's genius.—p. 31

It is in this spirit that Shelley writes his Preface to *Prometheus* (1820): "Didactic poetry is my abhorrence; nothing can be equally well expressed in prose that is not tedious and supererogatory in verse." [7] The autonomously moral and religious power of poetry stands out much more prominently in Shelley's view than in that of Wordsworth or Coleridge. The Kantian "Reason" which Coleridge, following Fichte and Schelling, improved from a hypothetically constructive to a gnostic faculty does not appear in Shelley's system. The honor conferred upon poetic imagination, though nebulous, is the highest possible. In general import, if not in metaphysical precision, and doubtless not by any direct indebtedness, Shelley's poetic is close to that of Schelling in the "absolute" phase of his idealism and to the mythopoeia of Friedrich Schlegel.

III

ONLY one English poet of this era furnishes a companion theory to Shelley's, and that is Blake, whose apocalyptic humanism, proclaimed in such notations as those collected by modern editors under the title *A Vision of the Last Judgment* and in the gigantic sprawling myths of his

[7] A few contrary admissions are to be found in less formal utterances. In a letter of 1811 to Miss Hitchener he said that a large part of *Queen Mab* was overtly didactic. "My opinion is that all poetical beauty ought to be subordinate to the inculcated moral." In a letter of January 1819 he confessed to Peacock: "I consider poetry very subordinate to moral and political science."

canonical prophetic books, can hardly be pressed into literary or even general aesthetic service. Blake connects less with the literary tradition than with cabbalistic and visionary theories of knowledge. He is a "literal realist of imagination" [8] who takes down what is dictated to him by the "Authors in Eternity." [9] Imagination is "the real and eternal World of which even this Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow." [1] To such an idealism not only the scientific view of nature but nature itself in any simple and external sense is repugnant. Blake, even more than Wordsworth, Coleridge, or Shelley, was an antagonist of scientism—explicitly, repeatedly and contemptuously. Nevertheless, there were moments when he could not quite stomach a nature poet like Wordsworth—or at least not Wordsworth's theory of his own achievement. Blake annotated Wordsworth's 1815 *Poems* thus: "I do not know who wrote these Prefaces: they are very mischievous & direct contrary to Wordsworth's own Practice." "Natural Objects always did & now do weaken, deaden & obliterate Imagination in Me. Wordsworth must know that what he writes valuable is Not to be found in Nature." [2]

> Error is created. Truth is Eternal. Error, or Creation will be Burned up, & then, and not till Then, Truth or Eternity will appear. It is Burnt up the Moment Men cease to behold it. I assert for My Self that I do not behold the outward Creation & that to me it is hindrance & not Action; it is as the dirt upon my feet, No part of Me.[3]

IV

INTERNATIONAL threats (first the republicanism of the French Revolution, then the imperialism of Napoleon) which prevailed during the era of English romantic poetry, and the economic and social troubles internal to England, produced at the level of popular criticism and reviewing, a wholesale resumption of something like the classical didactic mode of criticism, an impassioned appeal to patriotic, religious, and moral norms in the judgment of contemporary poems. "To devote poetry to religious purposes," a reviewer might say, "is to restore it to its original purpose." [4] "It is time," another might say (reviewing Coleridge's *Fears*

[8] W. B. Yeats, "William Blake and His Illustrations to *The Divine Comedy*," in *Essays* (New York, 1924), p. 14.

[9] Blake, *Poetry and Prose*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London, 1948), p. 869. ". . . a Grand Poem. I may praise it since I dare not pretend to be any other than the secretary; the Authors are in Eternity" (letter to Thomas Butts, July 6, 1803).

[1] *Jerusalem IV, To the Christians*, in *Poetry and Prose*, 1948, p. 535.

[2] *Poetry and Prose*, 1948, pp. 821–2.

[3] *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, in *Poetry and Prose*, 1948, pp. 651–2.

[4] William S. Ward, "Some Aspects of the Conservative Attitude Toward Poetry in English Criticism 1798–1800," *PMLA*, LX (June, 1945), 386–98. The quotation is from *The Christian's Pocket Magazine*, December, 1819.

in Solitude, during the Alarm of Invasion), "to enthrone reason on the summit of Parnassus; and make poetry the strengthener as well as the enlivener of the intellect;—the energetic instructor as well as the enchanting amuser of mankind." [5] Others might re-activate neo-classic scruples about the relation between instruction and pleasure.

> Poetry has been commonly supposed, indeed, to aim more at the gratification than the instruction of its votaries, and to have for its end rather delight than improvement; but it has not, we think, been sufficiently considered, that its power of delighting is founded chiefly on its moral energies.[6]

The vocabulary of these avowals might sometimes sound like an echo from the ranges of liberal criticism, whose peaks we have examined in Shelley and Blake. There was, however, little consonance between the two. Popular criticism always had in mind a didacticism and exhortation in the service of the tradition—the Church, the state, and the mores. The didacticism of Shelley and Blake, as was necessary for a theory of poetic creativity which had outrun all traditional theological associations, was a didacticism of revolution.

The defence of poetry against the claims of scientism had been during the 18th century an exploratory action, feeling its way toward the formulation of some kind of poetic autonomy. If scientific philosophy maintained that poetic statements did not satisfy scientific criteria, the answer was to be that poetry proceeded according to other criteria. In some way poetry proceeded according to its own criteria. And these were for the most part aligned with principles of sensory ("imaginative") and emotive pleasure. The autonomy was—at least implicitly—hedonistic. The later romantic development in the theory of creative "imagination" afforded, however, a more complex and ambiguous base from which the English defence of poetry during the 19th century could proceed. For one thing, the defence might and did continue along the line of an autonomy oriented toward pleasure—art for art's sake—a theme which we shall notice in a later chapter. But it might also, as we have just been seeing, wax into the assertion of a new, and autonomous, didacticism (more or less revolutionary). And this didacticism had at least two main phases, the rhapsodic (Shelleyan) and a later more calmly classical and cognitive (the Arnoldian—to be seen in our next chapter). The dual defence of poetry during the 19th century—the hedonistically autonomic, and the didactically autonomic—was a thoroughly plausible outcome and illustration of the ambivalent poise achieved in the continental defence of poetry by the end of the 18th century and taken over

[5] Ward, *loc. cit.*, p. 392, quoting *Monthly Review, or Literary Journal*, May, 1799.

[6] Ward, *loc. cit.*, p. 395, quoting *Edinburgh Review*, November, 1820.

by Coleridge and Wordsworth. Kant's beautiful symbols of moral value, his purposiveness without purpose, his judgment by feeling, are a sufficient promise of the whole development. We are speaking of Kant as typical of the thought of an era. Only the vaguest and most atmospheric acquaintance with German ideas (in the case of Shelley a direct dash of Fichte, a general modern philosophical education in Drummond's *Academical Questions*), an awareness of the ideas of Coleridge, or a feeling of sympathy with the neo-Platonic tradition, would be the genetic requirement for a given English literary man's participation in the movement. "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive."

V

We move toward a conclusion of this chapter and advance chronologically in the 19th century with quotations from two other authors, both more distinguished for general literary power than for clean lines in literary theory. Coleridge's friend De Quincey was given to ostentatious hints about his understanding of the metaphysics of Kant and performed various journalistic flourishes on the theme of German romantic literature and Germanic neo-Hellenism.[7] His essay of 1848 in the *North British Review* on Alexander Pope contains one of his chief claims to be remembered as a literary theorist—his distinction between a "literature of knowledge" and a "literature of power."

> The function of the first is to *teach;* the function of the second is to *move;* the first is a rudder, the second an oar or a sail. The first speaks to the mere discursive understanding; the second speaks ultimately, it may happen, to the higher understanding or reason, but always through affections of pleasure and sympathy. Remotely, it may travel towards an object seated in what Lord Bacon calls "dry light";—but proximately it does and must operate—else it ceases to be a literature of power—on and through that *humid* light which clothes itself in the mists and glittering iris of human passions, desires, and genial emotions. . . . there is a rarer thing than truth,—namely *power,* or deep sympathy with truth.
>
> What do you learn from a cookery-book? Something new, something that you did not know before, in every paragraph. But would you therefore put the wretched cookery-book on a

[7] René Wellek, "De Quincey's Status in the History of Ideas," *PQ,* XXIII (January, 1944), 250–5, 256 ff. For more about De Quincey's literary aesthetics, see Sigmund K. Proctor, *Thomas De Quincey's Theory of Literature* (Ann Arbor, 1943); John E. Jordan, *Thomas De Quincey Literary Critic* (Berkeley, California, 1952).

> higher level of estimation than the divine poem? What you owe to Milton is not any knowledge, of which a million separate items are still but a million of advancing steps on the same earthly level; what you owe is *power*,—that is, exercise and expansion to your own latent capacity of sympathy with the infinite, where every pulse and each separate influx is a step upwards, a step ascending upon a Jacob's ladder from earth to mysterious altitudes above the earth.
>
> It is certain that, were it not for the literature of power, . . . ideals would often remain amongst us as mere arid notional forms; whereas, by the creative forces of man put forth in literature, they gain a vernal life of restoration, and germinate into vital activities. The commonest novel, by moving in alliance with human fears and hopes, with human instincts of wrong and right, sustains and quickens those affections. Calling them into action, it rescues them from torpor. And hence the preëminency over all authors that merely *teach*, of the meanest that moves, or that teaches, if at all, indirectly by moving.[8]

The throbbing utterance, the allusion to "discursive understanding" and the "higher understanding or reason," put this on the grand level of romantic theory. It sounds sufficiently like the emotive didacticism of Shelley. At the same time if we read it in the context of Coleridge's religious influence upon De Quincey and De Quincey's theocratic social views united with Tory politics in the belief that the British Empire was the torch-bearer of Christian progress,[9] the passage may sound not unreconcilable with the moralistic popular reviewing which we have quoted from the era of thirty to fifty years before.

In his early miscellaneous essays, Thomas Carlyle was one of the most powerful and most accurate transmitters of German aesthetic philosophy to England. His program included energetic announcements of the antagonism between poetry and science and of the paramount claim which poetry laid to all the truth that mattered. The "polish and languor," the "external glitter and internal vacuity," of 18th-century literature he blamed squarely on the analytic science of the era. He noted a continuing prevalence of the enfeeblement even in his own day.

> We enjoy, we see nothing by direct vision; but only by reflection, and in anatomical dismemberment. Like Sir Hudibras, for every Why we must have a Wherefore. We have our little *theory* on all human and divine things. Poetry, the workings of genius itself, which in all times, with one or another meaning,

[8] Alden, pp. 340–3. Twenty-five years earlier De Quincey had made the same distinction in his *Letters to a Young Man*.

[9] Wellek, *loc. cit.*, pp. 253–4.

> has been called Inspiration, and held to be mysterious and inscrutable, is no longer without its scientific exposition. The building of the lofty rhyme is like any other masonry or bricklaying: we have theories of its rise, height, decline and fall,—which latter, it would seem, is now near, among all peoples.[1]

The power of the true poet, whenever in history it did appear, was quite another thing.

> The true Poet is ever, as of old, the Seer; whose eye has been gifted to discern the godlike Mystery of God's Universe, and decipher some new lines of its celestial writing; we can still call him a *Vates* and Seer; for he *sees* into this greatest of secrets, "the open secret"; hidden things become clear; how the Future (both resting on Eternity) is but another phasis of the Present: thereby are his words in very truth prophetic; what he has spoken shall be done.[2]

Carlyle's lectures *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* were delivered in May, 1840. The diminishing sequence of roles assigned to the hero in the six lectures—The Hero as Divinity, as Prophet, as Poet, as Priest, as Man of Letters, as King—represents both Carlyle's assurance in man's heroic destiny and at the same time a degree of acquiescence in the philosophy of decline, in the view that civilized advance means the decay of genius and greatness.[3] The poet is not the prophet, not the divinity. The opening of the lecture on the Hero as Poet surveys several phases in the power of the spirit to triumph against science.

> The Hero as Divinity, the Hero as Prophet, are productions of old ages; not to be repeated in the new. They presuppose a certain rudeness of conception, which the progress of mere scientific knowledge put an end to. There needs to be, as it were, a world vacant, or almost vacant of scientific forms, if men in their loving wonder are to fancy their fellow-man either a god or one speaking with the voice of a god. Divinity and Prophet are past. We are now to see our Hero in the less ambitious, but also less questionable, character of Poet; a character which does

[1] "Signs of the Times," in *Works* (1896–99), XXVII, 76. See Alba Warren, pp. 79–84.

[2] "Death of Goethe," *Works*, XXVII, 377. Cf. René Wellek, *Immanuel Kant in England* (Princeton, 1931), pp. 183–202.

[3] See René Wellek, "Carlyle and the Philosophy of History," *PQ*, XXIII (January, 1944), 55–76, for the uncertain kind of resemblance which obtains between Carlyle's views and the several forms of historical method available in Germany, France, or England at that day. Wellek argues that Carlyle's ethical normalism and divinatory impulsiveness are closer to Germanic forms of "historism" and literary nationalism than to French naturalistic and sociological trends.

> not pass. The Poet is a heroic figure belonging to all ages; whom all ages possess, when once he is produced, whom the newest age as the oldest may produce;—and will produce, always when Nature pleases. Let Nature send a Hero-soul; in no age is it other than possible that he may be shaped into a Poet.

But:

> I confess, I have no notion of a truly great man that could not be *all* sorts of men. The Poet who could merely sit on a chair, and compose stanzas, would never make a stanza worth much. He could not sing the Heroic warrior, unless he himself were at least a Heroic warrior too. I fancy there is in him the Politician, the Thinker, Legislator, Philosopher;—in one or the other degree, he could have been, he is all these. So too I cannot understand how a Mirabeau, with that great glowing heart, with the fire that was in it, with the bursting tears that were in it, could not have written verses, tragedies, poems, and touched all hearts in that way, had his course of life and education led him thitherward. The grand fundamental character is that of Great Man; that the man be great. Napoleon has words in him which are like Austerlitz Battles. Louis Fourteenth's Marshals are a kind of poetical men withal; the things Turenne says are full of sagacity and geniality, like sayings of Samuel Johnson.

Admitting not so much as Macaulay in his essay on Milton (that poetry flourishes best in a dark age), claiming not so much as Shelley in his *Defense* (that poets actually perform as legislators), Carlyle is shrewd enough to see the age-old paradox with which he is saddled, energetic enough to bounce it off as of small consequence. "Louis Fourteenth's Marshals are a kind of poetical men withal." On the high tide of Carlyle's plausible eloquence, an ancient moment in the history of the quarrel between rhapsode and dialectician is re-enacted with the victory reversed. One of the passages of Shelley's *Defense* most strongly reminiscent of Plato's *Ion* is that in which the Christian and chivalric poets of the early Middle Ages are credited with having created "forms of opinion and action . . . which, copied into the imaginations of men, became as generals to the bewildered armies of their thoughts." [4] In Plato's *Ion*, the rhapsode, after being pushed gradually into a corner with admissions that he was unfitted to discourse on such professional topics as medicine, charioteering, fishing, and piloting, gave utterance at the very last, under extreme pressure of the Socratic dialectical skill, to the desperate opinion that he might after all have been a successful general of the armies.

[4] *Defense*, ed. Cook, p. 25.

SUPPLEMENT

For the tides are the life of God in the ocean, and he sends his angel to trouble the great DEEP.
For he hath fixed the earth upon arches & pillars, and the flames of hell flow under it.
For the grosser the particles the nearer to the sink, & the nearer to purity, the quicker the gravitation.
For MATTER is the dust of the Earth, every atom of which is the life.
For MOTION is as the quantity of life direct, & that which hath not motion, is resistance.
For Resistance is not of GOD, but he—hath built his works upon it.
For the Centripetal and Centrifugal forces are GOD SUSTAINING and DIRECTING.
For Elasticity is the temper of matter to recover its place with vehemence.
For Attraction is the earning of parts, which have a similitude in the life.
For the Life of God is in the Loadstone, and there is a magnet, which pointeth due EAST.

For FRICTION is inevitable because the Universe is FULL of God's works.
For the PERPETUAL MOTION is in all the works of Almighty GOD.

For Newton nevertheless is more of error than of the truth, but I am of the WORD of GOD.

—Christopher Smart, *Jubilate Agno*, p. IX, ll. 7–16, 35–6, 45 (written in 1759), quoted from *Rejoice in the Lamb, A Song from Bedlam*, ed. William Force Stead (London, 1939), pp. 83–6, by permission of the editor and Jonathan Cape Limited

His [Thomas Taylor's] first three books, *The Mystical Initiations* (translations of the Orphic hymns, 1787), *Concerning the Beautiful* (a translation from Plotinus, 1787), and *The Philosophical and Mathematical Commentaries of Proclus* (two volumes, 1788–89), provoked immediate criticism in the *Monthly Review* and were apparently widely discussed. . . . A volume containing *The Cratylus, Phaedo, Parmenides and Timaeus of Plato* (1793), following hard upon the *Phaedrus* (1792), was hailed by a writer in the *Analytical Review* as a good beginning toward "a grand *desideratum* in English literature," the translation of all Plato's works. Taylor's efforts, however, were turned for the moment to other tasks, of which the most important were translations of Pausanias's *Description of Greece* (1794), *Five Books of Plotinus* (1794), and *The Fable of Cupid and Psyche* by Apuleius (1795).

These many books, filled as they all were with neo-Platonic ideas, gained Taylor a wide notoriety, if not esteem. For he was militant in thrusting his mystical, polytheistic neo-Platonism before the eyes of a sober and unsympa-

thetic eighteenth-century audience, who in turn ridiculed him as an insane fanatic. The materialism of the age and the concern of classical scholarship at the time with merely textual criticism aroused in Taylor a scorn which he freely expressed. In an eloquent plea for the study of Platonism, appended to his translation of the Orphic hymns, he called on his countrymen to resist these illiberal influences:

> The waters of Thames, heavy laden with the wealth of merchandize, and sonorous with the din of trade, may devolve abundance in a golden tide; but we must remember that the Daemon of commerce is at the same time advancing with giant strides, to trample on the most liberal pursuits, and is preparing with his extended savage arm, to crush the votaries of truth, and depopulate the divine retreats of philosophy. Rise then ye liberal few, and vindicate the dignity of ancient wisdom. Bring truth from her silent and sacred concealments, and vigorously repel the growing empire of barbaric taste; which bids fair to extinguish the celestial fire of philosophy in the frigid embraces of philology, and to bury the divine light of mind, in the sordid gloom of sense.—*The Mystical Initiations*, London, 1787, p. 226

This blunt indictment of contemporary civilization did not increase Taylor's popularity, though it attracted notice. Nor did the remedy which he proposed impress the eighteenth century with his sanity, though it made him famous. If London were found too far sunk in "barbarous ignorance," Taylor advised, the "liberal few" should fly to

> the regions of intellect, those fortunate islands of truth, where . . . we may find a retreat from the storms and tempests of a corporeal life. Let us build for ourselves the raft of virtue, and departing from this region of sense, like Ulysses from the charms of Calypso, direct our course by the light of ideas, those bright intellectual stars, through the dark ocean of a material nature, until we arrive at our father's land. For there having divested ourselves of the torn garments of mortality, as much as our union with body will permit, we may resume our natural appearance; and may each of us at length, recover the ruined empire of his soul.—*The Mystical Initiations*, pp. 226–7

—Frank B. Evans III, "Thomas Taylor, Platonist of the Romantic Period," *PMLA*, LV (December, 1940), 1067–8, by permission of the Modern Language Association of America

CHAPTER 20

THE ARNOLDIAN PROPHECY

§ *feeling and image c. 1795, the lyric norm, a French incident: Hugo's* Cromwell *and* Hernani, *Coleridge and Poe on the long poem, Mill on mere stories, Newman's Evangelical critique of Aristotle, Keble's* Praelectiones, *pre-Freudian intimations, "spasmodic" poetry, Aytoun, Tennyson—II. Arnold's brusque resistance, Preface to 1853, all depends on the subject, the "grand style," bad influence of Shakespeare on Keats—III. an altered classicism,* Essays, First Series, *continental sources, Joubert (clarity and truth), Heine (Philistinism), British parochialism,* The Modern Element in Literature, *"Wragg is in custody,"* The Literary Influence of Academies, *English proposals for linguistic authority, Samuel Johnson,* The Oxford Dictionary, *Arnold's suave anachronism—IV. English violence and individualism, French intelligence and form, poetry and "natural magic,"* On the Study of Celtic Literature, *"moral profundity," vivid disparagement of Shelley, Byron, Coleridge, Keats,* On Translating Homer, *against Teutonizing, "the object as in itself it really is,"* The Study of Poetry, *"truth and high seriousness"—V. difficulties with Arnold: 1. shift from substance to norm of style, "touchstones," 2. high seriousness, mistrust of "lighter kinds of poetry," what Chaucer lacks, Gray patronized, Burns merely ironic, 3. misunderstanding of anachronism,* Merope, *literal view of translating, 4. poetry a "criticism of life," detachment vs. application, "laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty"—VI. poetry to replace religion and philosophy,* Culture and Anarchy, *"sweetness and light,"* Literature and Science, *a new kind of emotivism—VII. other idealist voices, Emerson, James, "The Genteel Tradition," the new humanism in America, P. E. More, humanism with religion, Irving Babbitt, "insight" and "inner check"* §

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FEELING AND IMAGE CAME THROUGH THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, AS WE have seen, in close liaison, and they enjoyed at the dawn of the new era a high estate together. Feeling was somewhat indiscriminately treated as either something that welled up in the poet himself or (it made little difference) something that was discernible in the poem or in its images. Among the poetic genres, lyric had moved into the normative place. Or the broader and simpler concept of "poem" (or "poetry," in the soul of the poet) was the norm—it mattered not what "order of composition" the poet elected. The notion of untutored, and hence genuine, utterance was not likely to be far absent from poetic discussion. Let us re-focus momentarily on the situation about 1795 by quoting a letter from a poetess, "The Swan of Lichfield," Anna Seward.

> Our very peasants show that the seeds of poetry exist in the rude soil of their minds. Awaken their passions or excite their wonder, and you will often hear them speaking in metaphor, which is the poetic essence.[1]

Not that anybody said much directly against the classic fable, the story, the structural base of the long poem, but at the same time not much was urged in favor of that element.[2] Poetic theory had passed in the course of the centuries from a classic or Aristotelian focus on drama, through a heroic focus on epic (and then an implicit or hidden focus on satire and burlesque) to the romantic focus on lyric, the songlike personal expression, the feeling centered in the image. The romantic age as the age of lyric is a well enough recognized phenomenon—especially in England.

We have already observed certain lyrist features of the German high theorizing. In France during the 1820's occurred an incident in the history of dramatic literature which may perhaps be relevantly mentioned in this context. A classically regulated French drama, for reasons generated out of both revolutionary republicanism and Napoleonic and

[1] *Letters of Anna Seward* (Edinburgh, 1811), III, 320, October 1, 1793, quoted by Norman Maclean, "From Action to Image: Theories of the Lyric in the Eighteenth Century," in Crane, *Critics and Criticism*, p. 460.

[2] Cf. Donald M. Foerster, "The Critical Attack upon the Epic in the English Romantic Movement," *PMLA*, LXIX (1954), 432–47. "Thus, a writer in the *Reflector* elevates Ferdusi almost to Homer's level despite the fact that the Persian poet had paid little attention to those 'minuter excellences' of the epic, the fable and the three unities; and in the same breath that he says that *Paradise Regained* is really 'a drama of primal simplicity' and the *Odyssey* is not 'a legitimate epic,' Hallam calls it pure 'pedantry' to speak of the *Orlando Furioso* as a romance rather than an epic simply because it lacks a principal hero and a continuity of action. . . . A particular form was not often required; nor did an 'epic' seem to need a great action or a single action, a principal hero or a mighty hero, a race of gods or any other invisible agency. All that was demanded by many critics was a narrative thread which one could detect here and there in a poem of some length" (pp. 435–6).

Bourbon conservatism, had kept up a show of authority for much longer than might now seem understandable in the general retrospect of merely literary history. The revolt came with Hugo's Preface to *Cromwell*, 1827, and with *Hernani*, his first acted play, 1830. This was, to be sure, not officially a lyric movement. But it introduced not only a new taste for enjambed Alexandrines, for a diction coextensive with greater areas of life, and for a juxtaposition of the grotesque with the sublime, but, in part to accommodate the latter ideal, a taste for a profusion of sub-plot and extra incident and for incidentally and lyrically developed characters. The movement was away from the tighter Aristotelian structure. If an audience expected to enjoy anything richer than the traditional pseudo-Racinian austerity, argued Hugo in his Preface to *Cromwell*, the new romantic poet would have to hold the stage for somewhat longer than two hours. He would need no less than the whole evening (all the time usually given to the farce and comic opera which came after the tragedy to relieve it). But such a poet would give a money's worth of character portrayal (an entire hero, with all his genius, beliefs, conflicting passions, tastes, habits, and the crowd of figures who mill around him) as well as the panorama of a whole struggling epoch (its customs, laws, manners, spirit, insights, superstitions, happenings, and people). A gigantic spectacle! (*On conçoit qu'un pareil tableau sera gigantesque.*) A stage crowded with figures of all sizes and shapes. (*Il y aura foule dans le drame.*) [3] One conceives too that an art formed on the principle of a vast assemblage of diversely interesting parts will tend to promote a certain looseness of relationship among such parts and in the parts themselves a certain extravagance of local coloring.

"A poem of any length," Coleridge had said, "neither can be, or ought to be, all poetry." [4] He was echoed about thirty years later by Poe in words which have become even better known: "I hold that a long poem does not exist. I maintain that the phrase, 'a long poem,' is simply a flat contradiction in terms." [5] A modern editor of Poe has paid him an accurate compliment in saying that this pronouncement was "essentially a demand that the poets of his time be themselves and admit that epic themes . . . did not in fact excite their poetic faculties." "What really interested them were emotions of melancholy, nostalgia, puzzled yearning, and the like that could find their proper expression . . . in lyrics of moderate length." [6] In an earlier chapter we have noted J. S. Mill's inheritance of the associational doctrine of feeling—which in full the-

[3] Victor Hugo, "*Préface de Cromwell*" *and* "*Hernani*," ed. John R. Effinger, Jr. (Chicago, 1900), pp. 98–9, near the end of the *Préface*.

[4] *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter XIV (ed. Shawcross, II, 11).

[5] *The Poetic Principle*, first paragraph.

[6] W. H. Auden, *Edgar Allan Poe, Selected Prose and Poetry* (New York, 1950), p. xii.

oretical consciousness he adopted as alternative to the utilitarian and scientific rigors of his early training. And so:

> Lyric poetry, as it was the earliest kind, is also, if the view we are now taking of poetry be correct, more eminently and peculiarly poetry than any other: it is the poetry most natural to a really poetic temperament, and least capable of being successfully imitated by one not so endowed by nature.[7]

Mill distinguished [lyric] poetry from certain other and less intense kinds of emotive writing, novels and dramas, mere stories or *imitations* of life. These made an appeal to immature and shallow minds.[8]

A particularly instructive instance in the history of lyric feeling is that of John Henry Newman when he delivers his opinion in an early essay (1829) on no less a topic than Aristotle's *Poetics*.[9] Newman's Evangelical background puts him comfortably in possession of the same attitudes that Mill had to arrive at by struggle. He observes that Aristotle admires *Oedipus the King* for its plot and structure. That is to say, Aristotle conceives a play as "an exhibition of ingenious workmanship." But true poetry is spontaneous expression, the "free and unfettered effusion of genius." Newman goes to Greek drama in order to "listen to harmonious and majestic language, to the voices of sorrow, joy, compassion, or religious emotion,—to the animated odes of the chorus."

> A word has a power to convey a world of information to the imagination, and to act as a spell upon the feelings; there is no need of sustained fiction, often no room for it.

Newman's argument is a plenary participation in the Longinian double antithesis. The difference between plot and lyric passages is closely tied up with the difference between cold calculation on the part of the author and spontaneous effusion. Within a few years after his essay on poetry, Newman, moving along lines quite different from those of his literary criticism, had reached the opinion that the Evangelicals had landed Protestantism in a bondage to the "feelings." "His many attacks on the Evangelical system," observes a modern commentator, "are an attempt to rescue Evangelicals from a bondage he was willing to keep poets in."[1]

Newman's friend John Keble, Professor of Poetry at Oxford from

[7] "Thought in Poetry and its Varieties," in *Dissertations and Discussions* (London, 1859), I, 85. First published in 1832. Cf. *ante*, p. 308.

[8] Cf. Alba Warren, p. 71. Mill parallels Wordsworth's protest against "gross and violent stimulants," the melodrama of storm-and-stress novels.

[9] "Poetry with Reference to Aristotle's Poetics" appeared in the *London Review*, January, 1829. Cf. Alba Warren, pp. 35–45.

[1] Geoffrey Tillotson, "Newman's Essay on Poetry," in *Perspectives of Criticism*, ed. Harry Levin (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), pp. 161–195.

1831 to 1841, is a priestly poet and theorist whose *Praelectiones Academicae*, collected and published in 1844, turn on the same mistrust of "art," "execution," external medium, and plot construction, the same regard for the poet's spontaneous outburst of inmost feeling. The epigraph to his printed lectures is the image of the rhapsode and the magnetic ring from the *Ion* of Plato. Keble's emotivism invites a specially curious inspection in that it combines Aristotelian cathartic reminiscences with pre-Freudian intimations. He conceives poetry as an indirect strategy, an expression under "certain veils and disguises," whereby sensitive distraught souls may without blame find release from suffering. "It is the function of Poetry to facilitate, yet without prejudice to modest reserve, the expression of glowing motion." [2] The subtitle of his lectures is *De Poeticae Vi Medica.*

A distinct correlation with such minor but characteristic theorizing of the early Victorian era may be observed in the school of violently emotive and pseudo-Elizabethan dramatizing which erupted in the 1840's and was extinguished in the parody by W. E. Aytoun, *Firmilian: A "Spasmodic" Tragedy*, in 1854. Tennyson's *Maud* (1855), a "monodrama" of cloudy "madness," swirling around an all but undescribed action, participates in the spasmodic phase of English poetry. Matthew Arnold's two earliest volumes of poems, in 1849 and 1852, were touched by the same spirit and suffered some disadvantage in competing with it.[3]

II

Arnold emerges suddenly, however, the most imposing figure in English mid-Victorian criticism, not as a part of the lyric-spasmodic movement, but in a brusque classical resistance to it. The Preface to his *Poems* of 1853,[4] pitched in the high and confident tone of which he was to become increasingly master, announces the rationale of a valiant negative gesture, that of omitting from the volume of 1853 the long poem which gave the volume of 1852 its title, *Empedocles on Aetna.* Not because it is a poem on an ancient subject, says Arnold, though many may think this a sufficient reason. But because the dark emotions of the protagonist lead to no outcome. "Suffering finds no vent in action." The situation is

[2] *Keble's Lectures on Poetry 1832–1841*, trans. E. K. Francis (Oxford, 1912), I, 19–24, 36. See Alba Warren, pp. 46–9; Meyer Abrams, pp. 145–8.

[3] See Arthur Hugh Clough, in the *North American Review*, LXXVII (July, 1853), 4, anonymously reviewing Arnold's *Strayed Reveler* and *Empedocles* along with other volumes of verse including the Glasgow "mechanic" Alexander Smith's spasmodic *Life Drama*. Cf. Lionel Trilling, *Matthew Arnold* (New York, 1939), pp. 146 ff.

[4] The volume appeared in October.

monotonous and morbid. (Empedocles, it will be remembered, concludes his suffering by jumping into Aetna.) It is an ancient story, but it exhibits a modern and merely emotive development. The historical figure Empedocles himself is not a good hero for a poem, not a great example of Greek thought and feeling.

> Into the feelings of a man so situated there entered much that we are accustomed to consider as exclusively modern; . . . The calm, the cheerfulness, the disinterested objectivity have disappeared: the dialogue of the mind with itself has commenced; modern problems have presented themselves; we hear already the doubts, we witness the discouragement, of Hamlet and of Faust.

There is some wavering, some slithering of logic in Arnold's plea. In reaction against recent notions that "the poet must leave the exhausted past," [5] against "spasmodic" champions of "present import," "interest," and "novelty," and no less against the whole contemporary concept of "an era of progress, an age commissioned to carry out the great ideas of industrial development and social amelioration," Arnold wants to say that the "modernness or antiquity of an action . . . has nothing to do with its fitness for poetical representation." "The date of an action . . . signifies nothing." But it comes out pretty clearly before he is done that the great, "permanently" interesting actions, those that involve "permanent problems" and excite the "permanent passions," are all or nearly all to be found in the grand mythic repertories with which Greek epic and tragic writers were concerned. These endure. The occurrences of modern life are transitory. They have an immediate interest, but it is meretricious.

> The Greeks felt, no doubt, with their exquisite sagacity of taste, that an action of present times was too near them, too much mixed up with what was accidental and passing, to form a sufficiently grand, detached, and self-subsistent object for a tragic poem.

Arnold's Preface is an impressive exercise of hauteur at the expense of the thesis that literature has to be up to date.

But even more radically, the Preface is a countercheck quarrelsome to the prevailing lyric trend, a re-affirmation of the classic norm of the

[5] The complaint had been argued more picturesquely during the 17th-century quarrel of the ancients and the moderns. Cowley refers to "The cold-meats of the Ancients," "the threadbare tales of Thebes and Troy" (Preface to *Poems*, 1656; cf. Atkins, II, 173). In our own century the theme is well known. "The more progressive modern poets . . . discard not only archaic diction but also shop-worn subjects of past history or legend, which have been through the centuries a treasure-trove for the second-rate" (Harriet Monroe, ed. *The New Poetry, An Anthology*, New York 1927, p. vi).

fable. The "theory and practice alike" of the ancients, the "admirable treatise of Aristotle, and the unrivalled works of their poets, exclaim with a thousand tongues":

> 'All depends upon the subject; choose a fitting action, penetrate yourself with the feeling of its situations; this done, everything else will follow.'

"They regarded the whole; we regard the parts. With them, the action predominated over the expression of it." Hence the admirably severe style—the "grand style"—of the Greeks. And hence the dangerous influence on modern English poets of Shakespeare, a writer who had, along with his skill in managing "action," "situation," and "character," a further great gift, which, alas! could and did lead even him "astray." That was his power of "expression." "Here has been the mischief." Our modern poets, Keats and others, have been imitating the "attractive accessories," the "richness of imagery," not the central shaping power, the architecture.[6]

> We have poems which seem to exist merely for the sake of single lines and passages; not for the sake of producing any total impression. We have critics who seem to direct their attention merely to detached expressions, to the language about the action, not to the action itself.[7]

III

THE moderns, one might reflect, had been having it all their own way for nearly a century. It was time somebody spoke up for the ancients,

[6] A year before Arnold's Preface of 1853, a lesser if more systematic theorist, Eneas S. Dallas, had published his *Poetics: An Essay on Poetry*, containing a discussion of drama which reveals far more starkly than Arnold's plausibly written argument some of the commitments of a pantomimic regard for the element of dramatic action. "For looking at dramatic speeches in their true light, as the means of imitating character and life, not as a means of as it were by slanting mirrors throwing opinions among an audience, and far less as a running commentary on the whole play, it will be seen that if they convey anything different in kind from what may be conveyed, however feebly, by dumb show, they swerve from dramatic fitness, or at least are more than dramatic." Eneas S. Dallas, *Poetics: An Essay on Poetry* (1852), Book III, pp. 131–2. Cf. Alba Warren, pp. 137–8, and p. 139. Warren neatly locates the Dallas-Arnold fallacy under the rubric "assimilation of the drama to the visual arts."

[7] Arnold's tone becomes distinctly Augustan. "This over-curiousness of expression is indeed but the excessive employment of a wonderful gift—of the power of saying a thing in a happier way than any other man. Nevertheless, it is carried so far that one understands what M. Guizot meant, when he said that Shakespeare appears in his language to have tried all styles except that of simplicity. He has not the severe and scrupulous self-restraint of the ancients, partly no doubt, because he had a far less cultivated and exacting audience. . . . He is therefore a less safe model." "Others abide our question. Thou art free."

even if in overbearing tones, with a kind of kid-gloved arrogance. Not since Lessing perhaps had so keenly whistling a blade been tried on the wind in the classic quarter. But a classicism which had passed through that century of German idealism and German romantic Hellenism was bound to show a profound difference in its commitments. As the Platonism of Sidney stands in relation to that of Shelley, so the Aristotelianism of Lessing to that of Arnold.

Arnold's essays published in the *Cornhill* and other magazines, during the years immediately after he became Professor of Poetry at Oxford in 1857, and collected in 1865 as the first series of his *Essays in Criticism* show his classicism at perhaps its most level development, in the coolest and clearest light. He has gone to continental sources. One of these is the French Catholic, and conservative and Platonic *penseur* Joseph Joubert—a French Coleridge, as Arnold calls him, of less richness and power than the English Coleridge, but of more delicacy and penetration.

> Clearness is so eminently one of the characteristics of truth, that often it even passes for truth itself.
>
> Ignorance, which in matters of morals extenuates the crime, is itself, in matters of literature, a crime of the first order.
>
> In literature the one aim of art is the beautiful.
>
> To accustom mankind to pleasures which depend neither upon the bodily appetites nor upon money, by giving them a taste for the things of the mind, seems to me, in fact, the one proper fruit which nature has meant our literary productions to have.

Another is the German Jewish poet, self-exiled in France, arch-ironist and anti-romantic, Heinrich Heine, from whom Arnold takes up the weapons of a "life and death battle" against the *Philistine*. Arnold's hard-hitting repetitions succeeded in establishing this piece of German student lingo as the right name for the British middle-brow enemy of the noble and lovely.

> *Philistinism!*—we have not the expression in English. Perhaps we have not the word because we have so much of the thing. At Soli, I imagine, they did not talk of solecisms; and here, at the very headquarters of Goliath, nobody talks of Philistinism.[8]

[8] *Heinrich Heine*, in *Essays in Criticism, First Series* (London, 1902), p. 162. Cf. the last paragraph of Arnold's Preface to the *First Series*, the apostrophe to Oxford, "Adorable dreamer, whose heart has been so romantic! who hast given thyself so prodigally . . . only never to the Philistines"; and *Joubert* (*First Series*, p. 304), "the great apostle of the Philistines, Lord Macaulay." As early as 1827 Carlyle was using the term "Philistine" in his essays, and in *Sartor Resartus*, 1831, appears "Philistinism." See these words in *The Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*.

Arnold displays a fine scorn for British homebred humour and parochial complacency. He assumes the same kind of anti-domestic and classical superiority of taste as we have witnessed already in the comic theory of George Meredith. It is true that he has a great interest in the national spirit, and, like fashionable thinkers on the continent (Taine and others) to whom we shall allude in later chapters, he believes in the race, the milieu, and the moment, in short, in the cultural determination of literature.

> For a literary masterpiece, two powers must concur, the power of the man, and the power of the moment, and the man is not enough without the moment.[9]

But Arnold reverses the revolutionary and sociological emphasis of the continental thinkers. With him it is not as if the march of the historical process were bound to be working into something superior or more real. Just the opposite. The English spirit he is so much interested to define is a mixed potential in the blood and in the culture,[1] capable of being very badly developed in a bad modern age. In his inaugural lecture at Oxford, delivered in 1857 and entitled *The Modern Element in Literature*, Arnold appears as a strenuous champion of cultural classicism. He enjoys a high degree of confidence that the age of Sir Walter Raleigh in England was but poorly lighted, infested with footpads, over-dressed, and, compared with the age of Thucydides in Athens, naively incompetent to write history. (Distinct, though transvalued, reminiscences of the Peacockian frame of mind are to be noted in his remarks on the deficiencies of Roman literature—the Lucretian depression and ennui, the Virgilian "sweet, touching sadness," the Horatian want of "seriousness.") The progressive vulgarization of English middle-class culture since the Elizabethan age is a theme to which Arnold never tires of returning.

> . . . this paragraph on which I stumbled in a newspaper . . . : "A shocking child murder has just been committed at Nottingham. A girl named Wragg left her workhouse there on Saturday morning with her young illegitimate child. The child was soon afterwards found dead on Mapperly Hills, having been strangled. Wragg is in custody."

[9] *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time* (*First Series*, p. 4).

[1] "If we had been all German, we might have had the science of Germany; if we had been all Celtic, we might have been popular and agreeable; if we had been all Latinised, we might have governed Ireland as the French govern Alsace, without getting ourselves detested. But now we have Germanism enough to make us Philistines, and Normanism enough to make us imperious, and Celtism enough to make us self-conscious and awkward; but German fidelity to Nature, and Latin precision and clear reason, and Celtic quick-wittedness and spirituality, we fall short of" (*On the Study of Celtic Literature and on Translating Homer*, New York, 1883, p. 132, *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, VI).

> Nothing but that. . . . how eloquent, how suggestive are those few lines! "Our old Anglo-Saxon breed, the best in the whole world!"—how much that is harsh and ill-favoured there is in this best! *Wragg!* If we are to talk of ideal perfection, of "the best in the whole world," has any one reflected what a touch of grossness in our race, what an original shortcoming in the more delicate spiritual perceptions, is shown by the natural growth amongst us of such hideous names. Higginbottom, Stiggins, Bugg! [2]

Among the essays of the 1862 collection, the continental orientation of Arnold's critique stands out nowhere more remarkably than in *The Literary Influence of Academies.* Arnold here throws backward a last glance in the English tradition of wistful regard for the French and Italian academies. The proposals for reducing, refining, and "ascertaining" the Augustan language, the plans for legislative authority and for dictionaries, which appear from the time of the Royal Society on (in essays by Defoe, Addison, Swift, and numerous smaller busybodies and grammarians), had continued up to and even after the time of the greatest English effort to accomplish such dreams, the *Dictionary* of Samuel Johnson published in 1755.[3] But Johnson himself in his Preface had growled out something about the establishment of an academy . . .

> which I, who can never wish to see dependence multiplied, hope the spirit of English liberty will hinder or destroy.

And he had followed this up with equally heavy lunges in his *Life of Swift* (". . . an academy; the decrees of which every man would be willing, and many would have been proud to disobey") and in his *Life of Roscommon* ("In this country an academy could be expected to do but little. . . . We live in an age in which it is a kind of public sport to refuse all respect that cannot be enforced. The edicts of an English Academy would probably be read by many, only that they might be sure to disobey them").[4] The idea of a legislated norm of correct linguistic usage was never at home in England. The great Oxford dictionary actually conceived and begun during Arnold's lifetime was a project of a far different order, part of the empirical and investigative spirit of the age. The authority which it sought to establish was strictly a historical

[2] *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time* (*First Series,* p. 23).

[3] See Albert Baugh, *A History of the English Language* (New York, 1935), Chapter IX, "The Appeal to Authority 1650–1800"; Sterling A. Leonard, *The Doctrine of Correctness in English Usage, 1700–1800* (Madison, 1929); Allen Walker Read, "Suggestions for an Academy in England in the Latter Half of the Eighteenth Century," *MP,* XXXVI (November, 1938), 145–56.

[4] The passage on academies was added to the 1781 *Life of Roscommon* when Johnson constructed this by expanding a sketch published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1748.

authority. But Arnold enjoyed a tall and successful aloofness from the historizing spirit of his times. He broadcast his criticism with a suave assurance that made him seem anything but a gauntly anachronistic and mistaken prophet. "Dryden and Pope," he was to say in one of his later and most notorious pronouncements, "were classics of our prose." It would have been difficult for an Englishman of Arnold's time to participate more fully in the English Augustan spirit than Arnold does in his *Literary Influence of Academies* and *Function of Criticism in the Present Time*. Yet he did this with a difference. Swift in his Proposal to Lord Oxford ("Swift's petty proposal," Johnson called it) and in other essays on the theme had managed to sound no better than the sharp schoolmaster, a sensible, salutary, birch-rod influence, grammatical, philological, precisian. Arnold elevated the academy for which the Augustans had yearned into a vantage point of Olympian vision, a regulator of culture in the lofty creative sense which the German philosophy had by this time made plausible. In place of the Germanic and Carlylean throb of lyric freedom, it is true that he wanted the serenely normative and tempering light from classic France. He spoke of a "sensitiveness of intelligence" which is ready to defer to "authority." [5] But the nature of that authority! Without being very precise about it, he made it sound like a very wise and ultimate thing, something which in other essays he called "culture" and put even higher than religion.

IV

YET an accent of uncertainty appears here and there in Arnold's account of relations between the reasonable classic norm and the individual, nonconformist claims which are likely to be made by poetry—and especially, it would appear, by modern poetry. He entertains a notion that poetry proceeds from a certain honest energy. The English have plenty of this, and hence they do write poetry; for the same reason they write a violent, Corinthian polemic prose; and they write as individuals. The French on the contrary have intelligence and something called "form," and hence they write fine prose (not poetry—poetry has nothing to do with "form"), and they go beyond individual eccentricities, to produce not only prose but schools of prose.[6]

Poetry also has affinities for "magic." The concept takes the form of "natural magic," or "Celtic magic," in Arnold's retrospective expedition into 18th-century Celtomania, the lectures of 1865–1866 entitled *On the Study of Celtic Literature*. "Magic is the word to insist upon,—

[5] *First Series*, p. 49.
[6] *The Literary Influence of Academies* (*First Series*, pp. 50–2).

a magically vivid and near interpretation of nature." [7] (In its insistence not only on magic but on melancholy, Arnold's pontification was to play a part in determining the color of the actual Celtic revival in Ireland a few decades later.) [8] In some contexts, "natural magic" is Arnold's rendering of the "object" ("nature," the familiar landscape under the charm of moonlight) which stood on one side of the Coleridgean reconciliation of subject and object. The other half of the formula, the "subject," the human and moral kind of meaning, something much more congenial to Arnold, he called "moral profundity." Keats, Shakespeare's imperfect disciple, had an excess of natural magic, not enough moral profundity. Wordsworth had mainly moral profundity. Shakespeare had both qualities to the full.[9]

Arnold's mixed regard for the major English poets of the preceding generation produced some of the most highly colored images which he has left us—Shelley a "beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain," [1] Byron in the act of carrying across Europe "the pageant of his bleeding heart," [2] Coleridge a "poet and philosopher wrecked in a mist of opium," [3] Keats's letters the "love letters of a surgeon's apprentice." [4] The reason for Arnold's dislike of these poets was partly biographical,[5] and to that extent it was purely moral. He gives his most considered poetic reasons in the case of Byron: Byron had personality, talent, sincerity, strength, energy—but he lacked "matter," that is, a serious moral meaning.[6]

Arnold always has less difficulty in knowing what to admire in the classics. His Oxford lectures *On Translating Homer*, 1861, a disdainful reaction against the Teutonized, or Saxo-Norman,[7] translation by Francis William Newman, urge a conception of Homer as "eminently rapid,"

[7] *On the Study of Celtic Literature and On Translating Homer* (New York, 1883), *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, VI, p. 122; cf. pp. 102, 126, 128.

[8] John V. Kelleher, "Matthew Arnold and the Celtic Revival," in *Perspectives of Criticism*, ed. Harry Levin (Cambridge, Mass., 1952), pp. 197–227.

[9] *Keats* (*Second Series*, p. 119). Cf. *Maurice de Guérin* (*First Series*, pp. 81–2).

[1] *Second Series*, pp. 203, 252, in both *Shelley* and *Byron*.

[2] *Stanzas at the Grande Chartreuse*.

[3] *Second Series*, p. 203, again apropos of Byron.

[4] *Second Series*, p. 103.

[5] And especially in the case of Shelley. Arnold's distaste is a response to unsavory aspects of Shelley's life which had recently been both revealed and defended in Dowden's biography (*Second Series*, pp. 206 ff.).

[6] *Second Series*, p. 193.

[7] The 19th-century Teutonizing camp included such scholars as the Early English Text Society founders F. J. Furnivall and R. C. Trench, the historian E. A. Freeman and the poets William Barnes and Gerard Manley Hopkins. Macaulay's essay on Boswell's *Johnson* contains a good instance of the trend. Cf. Austin Warren, "Instress of Inscape," in *Gerard Manley Hopkins by the Kenyon Critics* (Norfolk, 1945), pp. 82–6. For some 17th-century instances of Teutonizing and a protest against it, see Joseph Glanvill, *An Essay Concerning Preaching*, 1678, in Spingarn, *Essays*, II, 274.

"eminently plain and direct," "eminently noble." [8] The argument is ruled in large measure by a concept of calm objectivity that is closely consonant with the theme of the classic action defined in 1853. Homer composes "with his eye on the object." [9] He thus participates in a virtue which the same lectures define as the main requirement (lacking in the eccentric English) of a good criticism—a "simple lucidity of mind," a capacity "to see the object as in itself it really is." [1]

The concept of a loftily objective aim carries through Arnold's career into his last important general pronouncement on poetics, the essay entitled *The Study of Poetry* which appears as introduction to T. H. Ward's *English Poets* in 1880 and is reprinted as the first of the *Essays in Criticism, Second Series,* in 1888. The Aristotelian phrase *philosophōteron kai spoudaioteron* is cue for the Arnoldian phrase "truth and high seriousness," expressing twin requirements of substance, failing in either of which a very good poet may fall far short of greatness. These requirements are found in the work of the few greatest poets, Homer, Dante, Milton, Shakespeare. Certain other ideas which appear in the essay of 1880 are taken up in the course of our next few pages.

V

"IF HE is not the greatest of English critics," says H. W. Garrod, "his make-up of being so is in itself a piece of greatness; and not to enjoy it is a piece of stupidity." [2] Fair enough. But if a further statement and summary of Arnold's position as developed by the end of his career be permitted a tone of moderate dissatisfaction, we would urge the following points.

1. His argument about Homer relies not only on an idea of dignified substance but rather heavily on another idea—one merely hinted in 1853—that of a classically objective style. Homer writes in the "grand style." This phrase, used in the Preface of 1853 apropos of the Greeks in general and repeated during Arnold's later years in two essays on Milton, expresses a stylistic (and somewhat chastened) version of the 18th-century Michelangelesque sublime.[3] "I think it will be found," he says in some *Last Words on Translating Homer,* "that the grand style

[8] *On the Study of Celtic Literature and On Translating Homer* (New York, 1883), p. 149.

[9] *Op. cit.,* p. 160. "Pope composes with his eye on the style."

[1] *Op. cit.* pp. 199–200. Arnold reiterates the phrase a few years later with heavy emphasis in the opening pages of his lecture on *The Function of Criticism* (*First Series,* pp. 1, 6). And Sophocles, it will be remembered, "saw life steadily, and saw it whole."

[2] *Poetry and the Criticism of Life* (Cambridge, Mass., 1931), p. 83.

[3] Trilling, *Matthew Arnold,* p. 173, points out Arnold's familiarity with Reynolds' *Discourses.*

arises in poetry, when a noble nature, poetically gifted, treats with simplicity or with severity a serious subject." [4] A similar concern not only for "substance" or "matter" but for "style" or "manner" runs through the important essay of 1880.[5] Both the substance and the style must have their "accent of high beauty, worth, and power." In this complication of his theory beyond the simple demand for the "excellent" subject of the 1853 Preface, there is a gain in critical insight—and not necessarily any contradiction. Yet one of Arnold's most memorable new terms in this essay is "touchstones." By this he means small pieces of poetry—"short passages, even single lines," a line of Dante, of Chaucer, of Shakespeare, two lines of Milton—unmistakable examples of great poetry, such as a critic ought to carry about with him and apply as norms in the estimate of other poetry. This open appeal to the chunklet, the sample piece of precious stuff, is a rather startling shift toward the norm of style and away from the initial classic thesis of 1853 that the "action is all." True, he says of his touchstone slightly misquoted from Chaucer ("O martyr souded in virginitee."): "A single line, however, is too little if we have not the strain of Chaucer's verse well in our memory." Still he is talking precisely about the "strain" of the *verse*. To make the touchstone test it would seem we do not have to know much if anything about the story of the little "clergeon."

2. On the other hand, the lofty purpose, the grand unified exclusive norm for poetry, the monolithic seriousness, which Arnold proclaims in 1880, is a consistent enough development from the Preface of 1853, where the requirement of the grand action is completed by a disparaging reference to comedy and the "lighter kinds of poetry." Comedy is good enough to take care of everyday materials, contemporary trifles. The "tragic poem," the poem with a seriously useful meaning (*pragmatic*, Arnold actually calls it in 1853, taking the expression from Polybius) requires the antique heroic subject matter. In 1880 Arnold has a more extended opportunity to betray his views on the comic modes of poetry. And we find that Chaucer is a poet of surpassingly fine style (a "divine liquidness of diction," a "divine fluidity of movement") and even of superior substance, in one sense (in his "large, free, simple, clear yet kindly view of human life"), but not in the full sense. He has truth, in short, but he lacks "high and excellent seriousness." Dryden and Pope, those two great "classics of our prose," were not "men whose criticism of life has a high seriousness," or even any "poetic largeness, freedom,

[4] *On the Study of Celtic Literature and On Translating Homer* (New York, 1883), p. 265.

[5] For an earlier gesture at a stylistic definition of poetry, see *Heinrich Heine* (*Essays, First Series*, p. 161): "Poetry is simply the most beautiful, impressive, and widely effective mode of saying things." Cf. later *Wordsworth* (*Second Series*, p. 128): "Poetry is nothing less than the most perfect speech of man, that in which he comes nearest to being able to utter the truth."

insight, benignity." The same low esteem of the Augustan mode works out in the patronizing estimate of Gray.[6] The basic lack of sympathy with the comic produces the meanly anaphoristic emphasis that the trouble with Burns' poetry lies in "Scotch drink, Scotch religion, Scotch manners." Burns' "genuine criticism of life" is merely "ironic." Arnold's stomach for literature suffers limitations of delicacy. "No one can deny," he says in the passage on Scotland, "that it is of advantage to a poet to deal with a beautiful world." And the retort of the 20th-century poet seems highly relevant: "It is an advantage to mankind in general to live in a beautiful world. . . . But the essential advantage for a poet is . . . to be able to see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see the boredom, and the horror, and the glory." [7]

3. Despite a partial submission to the historistic trend of his age (his congratulation of Shakespeare, for instance, because he "applied freely in literature the then modern ideas"),[8] Arnold never seems to set a correct value on the formal principle of anachronism in poetry, the principle of rebirth in analogy and parody. The theoretical fault may be illustrated, *ad hominem*, in the Oxford Professor's cold fiasco *Merope: A Tragedy*, his most determined attempt as a poet to avail himself of one of those great classically permanent actions described in the Preface of 1853. The return to Messenia in that "period of transition from the heroic and fabulous to the human and historic age of Greece" is made in a spirit all too literal. The noted actress Helena Faucit tactfully shied away from Arnold's invitation to participate in this sort of thing. There were lessons in the metaphoric handling of the antique that Arnold had neglected to learn from Racine or Corneille, from Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, or from Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, the last of which one may be doubtful that he had ever read. The same kind of literal demand comes out in his theory of a Homeric translation (if not so flagrantly in the sample passages which he translates). Let the unhappy translator "not trust to his own judgment of his own work; he may be misled by individual caprices."

> Let him ask how his work affects those who both know Greek and can appreciate poetry; whether to read it gives the Provost of Eton, or Professor Thompson of Cambridge, or Professor Jowett here at Oxford, at all the same feeling which to read the original gives them. I consider that when Bentley said of Pope's translation, "It was a pretty poem, but must not be called

[6] F. R. Leavis, "Revaluations (XI): Arnold as Critic," *Scrutiny*, VII (December, 1938), 319–32.

[7] T. S. Eliot, *Use of Poetry*, p. 98. "The vision of the horror and the glory was denied to Arnold, but he knew something of the boredom."

[8] *Heine* (*First Series*, p. 176).

Homer," the work, in spite of all its power and attractiveness, was judged.[9]

Here again there were lessons of the neo-classic age which Arnold might have read more tolerantly. What Ascham in *The Scholemaster*, what Dryden in his Prefaces to Ovid and the *Sylvae*, said about "metaphrase," "paraphrase," "imitation," might not have provided Arnold with a ready-made and sufficient view. The older school of translation, like Arnold, was looking for a certain spirit, a certain "feeling." But in the freedom of their practice, verging on "imitation," lay an insight, or perhaps merely a habit derived from live classical studies, which was foreign to the age of Arnold. Arnold's arguments about translation (his stern rejection of Newman's effort in search of an idiom) illustrate the growth of the historical sense in his era but also the limitations of that sense as the age applied it to poetry. He was running parallel to the more or less well informed archeologizing of the Shakespearian stage which had begun in the time of Macready.

4. Another 20th-century critic has spoken of Arnold's essays as "higher pamphleteering," [1] and yet another has called Arnold "rather a propagandist for criticism than a critic." [2] Very simply, very characteristically, and very repetitiously, Arnold spent his career in hammering the thesis that poetry is a "criticism of life." This led to a spectacular involvement in some of the difficulties that have always appeared for didactic theory. In the essay on *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time*, that function is described as the promotion of a lively circulation of the best ideas yet available to humanity,[3] and hence the production of a climate in which poetry can thrive. One "criticism" provides the set-up and encouragement for another "criticism," and the embarrassment of equating poetry with some kind of quasi-philosophic discipline is greatly accentuated. One recent authority [4] on Arnold's thought has interpreted his whole career as a tension between the impulse of detachment and that of practical application, between the Professor of Poetry and the Inspector of Schools. Arnold is frequently aware of the difficulty and attempts to qualify the phrase "criticism of life" as he applies it to poetry. He introduces into the predicate of his definition of "poetry" a safety device of circularity, a kind of short-circuit fuse. A tabular arrangement of the most definite avowals in several of his essays will show the dilemma.

[9] *On the Study of Celtic Literature and on Translating Homer* (New York, 1883), p. 144.

[1] F. R. Leavis, *Scrutiny*, VII, 321.

[2] T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood* (London, 1920), p. 1.

[3] Literary criticism is "a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas" (*First Series*, p. 37).

[4] E. K. Brown, *Matthew Arnold, A Study in Conflict* (Chicago, 1948).

> The end and aim of all literature is . . . a criticism of life.
> —*Joubert*, 1864 (*First Series*, p. 303)

> Poetry is at bottom a criticism of life.
> —*Wordsworth*, 1879 (*Second Series*, p. 143)

> Poetry [is] a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty.
> —*The Study of Poetry*, 1880 (*Second Series*, p. 5; cf. p. 48)

> I have seen it said that I allege poetry to have for its characteristic this: that it is a criticism of life; and that I make it to be thereby distinguished from prose, which is something else. So far from it, that when I first used this expression, *a criticism of life*, now many years ago, it was to literature in general that I applied it, and not to poetry in especial. 'The end and aim of all literature,' I said, 'is, if one considers it attentively, nothing but that; *a criticism of life*.' And so it surely is; the main end and aim of all our utterance, whether in prose or in verse, is surely a criticism of life. We are not brought much on our way, I admit, towards an adequate definition of poetry as distinguished from prose by that truth; still a truth it is, and poetry can never prosper if it is forgotten. In poetry, however, the criticism of life has to be made conformably to the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty.[1]
> —*Byron*, 1881 (*Second Series*, pp. 186–7)

VI

ARNOLD's didacticism reaches its mature and accurate formulation in the sentence so often quoted from the opening of the 1880 Essay:

> More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry.

("But now I only hear Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar. . . . And we are here as on a darkling plain . . .") Arnold marks out a didactic function for poetry without any of the optimistic frenzy which buoyed the utterances of a Shelley or a Carlyle. He speaks with a level precision and a resolved firmness that make his prophecy all the more appalling. In the essays of broader cultural and quasi-religious scope which oc-

[1] The essay on Wordsworth includes lengthy disavowals of anything like an approval of the *doctrines* expressed in Wordsworth's poetry.

cupied his middle period, 1867–1877, especially in *Culture and Anarchy*, 1869, he had expounded in somewhat more detail the kind of new message—the "sweetness and light," the blend of Hebraic spirituality and obedience with Hellenistic critical spirit—which it should be the aim of "culture" and of poetic education to propagate. Religion had once done a fairly good job, but religion now seemed to Arnold to reside mainly in religious "organizations," and these were only "machinery." The highest promotion of the sweet, clear inner life would now be the job of "culture." The text would be the Greek classics.[2]

If we look at Arnold's most direct combat with science, a Cambridge lecture entitled *Literature and Science*, first printed in 1882, we discover the battle positions to be not so much different from those of the Peacock-Shelley incident. We see the names of the new generation of scientific bravos: Huxley, pronouncing a "funeral oration" on literary education at the opening of a college in Birmingham; Renan, Spencer, Darwin, and the liberal politician John Bright. A congress of elementary school teachers at Sheffield hears a proposal that the schools and the universities should come together on the common ground of natural science. On the ground of the dead languages, they can not. Arnold's rebuttal shares much with Shelley. It differs, however, in a more antiseptically confident tone, a quality of assurance that is even quasi-scientific. Arnold is on the stand to testify that literature is not, as Professor Huxley believes, merely *belles lettres*. Literature reaches out and begins with all knowledge, political, social, scientific—it is literally and inclusively "the best which has been thought and said in the world." Literature will be up with the latest scientific data. It will face even Mr. Darwin's proposition that the human ancestor was "a hairy quadruped furnished with a tail and pointed ears, probably arboreal in his habits." But literature (or the humane part of it, "humane letters") will go beyond all mere "instrument" knowledge and all merely "natural" knowledge; it will grasp knowledge in relation with the human "sense for conduct," the human "sense for beauty." Shelley's *Defense* had said much (in richly emotive terms) about "emotion," which was the efficient cause of moral action, even if it was not the faculty of moral definition. But there was no intimation in Shelley that ultimately there were not good enough grounds for the emotions of which he spoke. Arnold's more scientifically circumspect profession of faith does try to keep the tweezers between his truth-searching faculty and that highly desirable yet untruthful element of emotion.

> The middle age could do without humane letters, as it could do without the study of nature, because its supposed knowledge was made to engage its emotions so powerfully. Grant that the supposed knowledge disappears, its power of being made to en-

[2] Consult *Sweetness and Light*, the concluding Oxford lecture of 1867, which becomes the first chapter of *Culture and Anarchy*, 1869.

> gage the emotions will of course disappear along with it—but the emotions will remain. Now if we find by experience that humane letters have an undeniable power of engaging the emotions, the importance of humane letters in man's training becomes not less, but greater, in proportion to the success of science in extirpating what it calls "medieval thinking." [3]

VII

ARNOLD was of course not the only voice of his kind to be heard during the long Victorian era. In America the ethical idealism of the New England litterateurs in the "classical" period, notably Emerson, is at least as traceable an influence as that of Arnold in the development of a "Genteel Tradition" [4] that has carried far into our own century. One of the most aesthetically acceptable—brilliantly cautious—statements of a moral perspective upon literature to appear during the whole period was that in the prefaces and other critical essays of Henry James. All art, he would say, is in basis moral. (He was speaking against Gautier's *l'art pour l'art*, and no less against the naturalism of Balzac.) [5] Both in art and in criticism, "the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very near together." "In each of the parts there is something of each of the other parts." [6]

> There is one point at which the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very near together; that is, in the light of the very obvious truth that the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer. In proportion as that mind is rich and noble, will the novel, the picture, the statue, partake of the substance of beauty and truth. To be constituted of such elements is, to my vision, to have purpose enough. No good novel will ever proceed from a superficial mind; that seems to me an axiom which, for the artist of fiction, will cover all needful ground.[7]

A medley of such voices was very friendly to the rise in academic America shortly after the turn of the century of a new humanistic and ethical school of criticism which, through the resounding efforts mainly of two champions, kept a hearing for about thirty years. It is true that

[3] *Literature and Science*, in *Four Essays on Life and Letters*, ed. E. K. Brown (New York, 1947), pp. 109–10.

[4] Cf. George Santayana, *The Genteel Tradition at Bay* (New York, 1931).

[5] *French Poets and Novelists* (London, 1919), pp. 14, 31–56, 116, essays on Baudelaire, Gautier, Balzac; *Notes on Novelists* (New York, 1914), pp. 122, 126, on Balzac.

[6] *The Art of Fiction*, in *Partial Portraits* (London, 1911), pp. 404–6, 392. Cf. Morris Roberts, *Henry James's Criticism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1929), p. 63.

[7] Beginning of last paragraph of *The Art of Fiction*.

Paul Elmer More in the Seventh volume (1910) of his long series of *Shelburne Essays* utters a lament for the deficiencies of a kind of "culture" which he tries to define by pairing Arnold with a much earlier English critic, the Deist Shaftesbury. "The fault," he says, "lay not in any intrinsic want of efficiency in the critical spirit, nor in any want of moral earnestness." "These men were lacking in another direction: they missed a philosophy which could bind together their moral and their aesthetic sense, a positive principle besides the negative force of ridicule and irony." Thus they left criticism open to subjectivism, impressionism, and moral anarchy.[8] Here was a tightening of the belt—or a promise of sharper teeth for the ethical tradition. In More himself, humanism enjoyed an overt alliance with religion and so of course was not the pure Arnoldian critique of life. But in More's Harvard colleague Irving Babbitt, the concepts of "insight" into the Higher Will through literary symbol and a consequent "inner check" upon romantic emotive expansiveness and naturalistic descendentalism ("romanticism on all fours") received a treatment which in the purity of its withdrawal from revealed religion[9] surpassed even the cultural dreams of Arnold. Babbitt's campaign in its negative phases, his attack on Rousseau, romanticism, and all that, is crowded with richly reported and bizarre incidents and luridly lit up with the flambeaux of his indignant rhetoric. His positive schemes, however, are more thinly delineated, his main illustrative appeals, to the drama of the Greeks, but sketchily intimated. Babbitt showed a heavy hand when late in his career he tried close dealing with an actual work of romantic English literature. His censure of Coleridge's imaginative control in *The Ancient Mariner* seems the all but fanatical result of a theory of literature that was not in fact literary. The twin detonations in 1930 of two anthologies, one for the new humanists and one against them, announced the end of a didactic critical movement which, adequately defined in Arnold's terms of 1880, had in the humanism of his successors moved no nearer to a distinct concern for literature.

SUPPLEMENT

The history of the creative arts is long
But the belief in art as the supreme
Criterion of experience is as new

[8] "Criticism," in *Shelburne Essays, Seventh Series* (New York, 1910), pp. 223–4. Cf. Zabel, *Literary Opinion in America*, p. 30.

[9] More defined Babbitt's kind of humanism as "the study and practice of the principles of human happiness *uncomplicated* by naturalistic dogmas on the one side and religious dogmas on the other" (*On Being Human*, Princeton, 1936, p. 18). Babbitt's parleying with Buddhism was a largely philosophic performance.

As the electric light. Our poets belong
In dangerous numbers to this strange persuasion.
Small wonder that they live like ghosts and perish
Without biographies; small wonder too
That they adopt an adjective for their name
And soberly defer to those who wear
The title of Intellectual. Poets by hosts
Spring fully armed from pure obscurity
To bay like demons at us and to slay
The man in front; our brawls are commonplaces.
. . . .
All rime more or less
Has a religious ancestry, for man,
The evidence says, is a believing being.
Nor does it follow that the civilized,
The secular and the profane in art must fail
For lack of faith—thus too the evidence.
What here pertains is the solicitude
Of modern artists for their missing gods,
Our attitude of nervous self-defence
Against the emotions roused by great belief,
Our purely literary use of Christ
In painting, prose and rime, our use of Christ
In any cynical neo-Christian sense
Or even with that perfunctory good-will
Which characterizes Tolerance.
. . . .
By now the plaints of Arnold are too stale
For repetition, yet it is curious
I think to make comparison of his lush
Nostalgia for the Age of Faith with ours
Which is nostalgia madly furious.
In part that deep Victorian melancholy
Is father to our more frantic abnegation
Of all the supernatural. Rime must refer
Anti-religiously to belief and nature,
Or else create the kind of nomenclature
Which hints at natural science.

—Karl Shapiro, *Essay on Rime* (New York, 1945), pp. 52–4, "The Confusion in Belief," copyright 1945 by Karl Shapiro. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc.

Poems by Alexander Smith, a volume recently published in London, and by this time reprinted in Boston, deserve attention. They have obtained in England a good deal more notice than is usually accorded there to first volumes of verse; nor is this by any means to be ascribed to the mere fact that the writer is, as we are told, a mechanic; though undoubtedly that does add to their ex-

ternal interest, and perhaps also enhances their intrinsic merit. It is to this, perhaps, that they owe a force of purpose and character which makes them a grateful contrast to the ordinary languid collectanea published by young men of literary habits; and which, on the whole, may be accepted as more than compensation for many imperfections of style and taste.

. . . .

We do not at all mean to prepare the reader for finding the great poetic desideratum in this present Life-Drama. But it has at least the advantage, such as it is, of not showing much of the *litterateur* or connoisseur, or indeed the student; nor is it, as we have said, mere pastoral sweet piping from the country. These poems were not written among books and busts, nor yet

> By shallow rivers, to whose falls
> Melodious birds sing madrigals.

They have something substantive and lifelike, immediate and first-hand, about them. There is a charm, for example, in finding, as we do, continual images drawn from the busy seats of industry; it seems to satisfy a want that we have long been conscious of, when we see the black streams that welter out of factories, the dreary lengths of urban and suburban dustiness,

> the squares and streets
> And the faces that one meets,

irradiated with a gleam of divine purity.

There are moods when one is prone to believe that, in these last days, no longer by "clear spring or shady grove," no more upon any Pindus or Parnassus, or by the shady side of any Castaly, are the true and lawful haunts of the poetic powers: but, we could believe it, if anywhere, in the blank and desolate streets, and upon the solitary bridges of the midnight city, where Guilt is, and wild Temptation, and the dire Compulsion of what has once been done—there, with these tragic sisters around him, and with Pity also, and pure Compassion, and pale Hope, that looks like Despair, and Faith in the garb of Doubt, there walks the discrowned Apollo, with unstrung lyre; nay, and could he sound it, those mournful Muses would scarcely be able as of old, to respond and "sing in turn with their beautiful voices."

Empedocles on Etna and other Poems, with its earlier companion volume, The Strayed Reveller and other Poems, are, it would seem, the productions (as is, or was, the English phrase) of a scholar and a gentleman; a man who has received a refined education, seen refined "society," had been more, we dare say, in the world, which is called the world, than in all likelihood has a Glasgow mechanic. More refined, therefore, and more highly educated sensibilities,—too delicate, are they, for common service?—a calmer judgment also, a more poised and steady intellect, the *siccum lumen* of the soul; a finer and rarer aim perhaps, and certainly a keener sense of difficulty, in life;—these are the characteristics of him whom we are to call "A."

—[Arthur Hugh Clough], review of "Recent English Poetry," *North American Review*, LXXVII (July, 1853), 1, 4–5, 12

CHAPTER 21

THE REAL AND THE SOCIAL: ART AS PROPAGANDA

§ *dialectic themes: the historical, the scientific, the realistic, the sociological, positivism and the future of art, study of origins, compromises with idealism—II. "realism," pictorial and literary, Courbet, Flaubert, the "democratic brush," transition to "naturalism," Zola, novelist as scientist,* Le Roman Expérimental, *later versions in America, Frank Norris,* Responsibilities of the Novelist, *environment, brutality, Gothic naturalism, a form of "romanticism"—III. early phases of Russian criticism, ideology of nationalism, Russian novelists, Belinsky and his disciples, realism and social relevance, hidden meanings, sequence of literary genres, disapproval of folk poetry, of pure art and pleasure themes, "The Destruction of Aesthetics," psychology and hygiene, paradox of determinism and revolutionary sacrifice—IV. Tolstoy, "the conscience of the world,"* What Is Art?, *Christian anarchy, "infection," religious emotion of* this *age, pride, sex, ennui, "pleasure" arts caricatured, five-sense aesthetics, "counterfeit" art (Wagner's* Nibelungen Ring), *rejection of his own novels, peasant boys, Tolstoy's taste in pictures, great art and the plain man, impressionist pictures and symbolist poetry, obscurity and immorality, Baudelaire's* Le Galant Tireur, *Tolstoy on Shakespeare—V. Marxist criticism, class propaganda, deterministic origins, isolation of modern artist, bourgeois culture, mirror images, Christopher Caudwell,* Illusion and Reality, *1937, Marxism and historical literary studies, party-line mimesis, society the work of art—VI. American phases, "muckraking," the 1930's, keeping up with "the vanguard of the Proletariat," Emerson and*

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Whitman, confidence in the common man, Parrington's Main Currents, *Max Eastman, Edmund Wilson, "An Autopsy"—VII. "expression" and "communication," Ortega y Gasset,* The Revolt of the Masses, *the "commonplace mind,"* The Dehumanization of Art, *exclusiveness and withdrawal* §

THE ARNOLDIAN PROPHECY WAS DIRECTED TOWARD THE FUTURE OF SOME autonomous poetic power—appealing for authority, so far as it made any such appeal, to the Hellenic and the Hebraic past. Poetry was not to take orders from, but to take the place of, modern philosophy and religion. Poetry was to tell science what science was working for. The fact was, however, that the most urgently didactic trend in European literary theory of the 19th century aimed at making poetry something far other than an autonomous power or an antique authority. This trend was already well under way in Arnold's time and was destined to arrive at its zenith in the English-speaking world during the earlier 20th century, at about the same time as the less aggressively launched campaign of neo-humanism. This was to be a didacticism committed to the exposition and advancement of a dogma that would receive its definition from a quite unpoetic authority. In its mature phase, it was to issue in a propagandism that far outdid in abstractive solidarity anything ever attempted by poetry in the ages of Christian humanism. In Arnold's day the movement was gaining most headway in continental places somewhat removed from his observation; and nearer home, in France, it was apparently not one of the things which most engaged his attention.

Four main emphases, closely inter-reliant, appear in the post-Hegelian literary thought of the mid-century continent. These are the historical, the scientific, the realistic, the sociological. In place of the Hegelian "spirit" which worked the dialectical play and counter-play of the historical process, post-Hegelianism produced the dialectic of purely material forces, the *mystique* of time and progress. Nevertheless, the idea of a certain kind of function and future for poetry fared not badly. Science with social programs was more inclusive in its tolerance than the simply rationalistic enlightenment of an earlier era. Science with such alliances could even perhaps make better offers than could metaphysical idealism. Whereas Hegel, the idealistic encyclopedist of the arts, had arrived at a view of metaphysical fulfillment which meant the end of art and prophesied for it no future at all, the French positivism of Saint-Simon, Proudhon,[1] and Comte, in a manner curiously akin to the vision

[1] *Du principe de l'art et de sa destination sociale,* 1865.

of Schelling, Friedrich Schlegel, or Shelley, assigned to art a gloriously continuing imaginative function in the phases of human advancement that were to succeed upon the outmoded eras of religion and metaphysics. At the same time, another sort of French positivism, that represented most notably by the literary philosopher and historian Taine, prescribed a rigorous study of literature in its origins (the determining forces of *race*, *milieu*, and *moment*). And this prescription in the long run had very noticeable effects upon the actual study of literature not only in France but abroad. To construct literary methodologies on the principle of an expansively propagandist future for poetry never became very practicable. But the richly various conditions under which literature had been produced in the past, the economic, the social, the religious, the total of influences on art which Taine called "moral temperature," these made an increasingly inviting field for the application of the "experimental" method.

So far as the definition of art itself was concerned, much was borrowed from German romantic idealism—even by Taine himself [2]—and by other French aestheticians of the romantic generation (Cousin, Jouffroy, and their successors) as they assumed various postures of moderation, compromise, or merger, in response to the increasingly historical, realistic, and social claims of the age.[3]

II

"REALISM"—if we may use the term broadly to mean a reaction against a number of things that were thought in the mid-19th-century to be *un*-real, not only Gothic romance, picaresque adventure, and allegorical fantasy but classic composure and conservative morality—realism as an aesthetic norm comes into view not only for literary but for pictorial art at about the same time, in the exhibition by Courbet of 1855 and the publication of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* in 1856. Flaubert's theory of realism was concerned with the professional procedures of a novelist. He conceived a scientific detachment, a coolness and care, in the observation of materials. He made a trip to Egypt to study the scenery for his novel *Salammbô*. "Flaubert, the son and brother of distinguished physicians," Sainte-Beuve would say, "holds his pen like a scalpel." [4] At the same time it can scarcely be said that the novels of Flaubert actually

[2] Cf. Iredell Jenkins, "Hippolyte Taine and the Background of Modern Aesthetics," *Modern Schoolman*, XX (March 1943), 141–56.

[3] Victor Cousin (1792–1867), Théodore Jouffroy (1796–1842), Victor de Laprade (1812–83), Jean-Charles Lévêque (1818–1900).

[4] *Causeries du Lundi* (1857–70), XIII, 363; from a manuscript chapter by René Wellek.

exhibit a very servile rendering of natural objects. "People believe I am taken with the real," he said—"whereas I detest it." [5] In the theoretical manifestoes which accompany the realist movement in painting, however, and notably in the codification of Courbet's friend Castagnary, there are no such sophistications.

> The painter of our own time will live our own life, with our own habits and our own ideas. He will take the feelings he gets from the look of things in our society, and give them back to us in pictures where we recognize ourselves and our own surroundings. It will not do to lose sight of the fact that we ourselves are both the subject and the object of art: art is the expression of ourselves for our own sake.[6]

"To make verses," says Courbet himself, in a way that happily shows us the bearing of the doctrine on literature, "is unfair; to speak in a fashion different from all the world, that is an aristocratic pose." [7] Courbet's critics spoke of his "scrupulous imitation of nature," the "signature of nature itself," his "democratic brush." [8] But the Courbet phase of French realism was regarded even by its promoters as a transitional moment.[9] Inherent in its sociological implications, the here and now democratic "truth" which it pursued, was the notion of the ordinary, and hence the notion of the monotonous, the meager, the drab, the underprivileged, even the seamy. And this realism rather quickly intensified into the phase called "naturalism." Of this phase the greatest exponent was Zola. Literary "realism" and "naturalism" constituted an aesthetic centered in the prose novel, which was the literary genre most directly dedicated to the social problems of the 19th century. The naturalistic novelist conceived himself as a scientific sociologist and psychologist, an experimentalist working with his hypotheses like a scientist in a laboratory. The object of the experiment was the social organism. One had to tell the truth about it, not fairy tales. One might admit only (when talking about the "constant evolution of the human spirit") that the eye of the observer did color the picture. The literary artist gave "a corner of

[5] Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance*, III (Paris, 1892), 67–8. The statement is made apropos of *Madame Bovary*. "*On me croit épris du réel, tandis que je l'exècre, car c'est en haine du réalisme que j'ai entrepris ce roman.*" Melvin Friedman, "Passages on Aesthetics from Flaubert's Correspondence," *Quarterly Review of Literature*, IV [1949], 390–400, gives us a translation of "the total . . . of Flaubert's comments on aesthetics." Cf. Gilbert and Kuhn, pp. 492.

[6] Jules Antoine Castagnary, *Salons* (*1857–70*), I (Paris, 1892), 187. Cf. Gilbert and Kuhn, pp. 481–3.

[7] Emile Gros-Kost, *Courbet, Souvenirs intimes*, 1880, p. 31.

[8] H. d'Ideville, *Gustave Courbet, Notes et documents sur sa vie et son oeuvre*, (Paris, 1878), pp. 107 ff. Gros-Kost and Ideville are quoted from Gilbert and Kuhn (pp. 481–2), to whom our account of Courbet is substantially indebted.

[9] Cf. Harry Levin, "What is Realism?" and Albert J. Salvan, "*L'Essence du réalisme français*," in *Comparative Literature*, III (Summer, 1951), 193–9, 218–3.

nature seen through a temperament."[1] Zola's theoretical treatise, *Le Roman Expérimental,* 1880, describes the setting up of the initial conditions, the release of the action (the life of a libertine, for instance, such as Hulot in Balzac's *La Cousine Bette*), then the patient observation by the scientist-novelist, leading to a sober knowledge,[2] rich in practical implications for the improvement of society.[3] The novelist aimed at nothing less than a supreme knowledge, how to be "master of good and evil, how to rule life, how to rule society."[4] Zola found an authoritative manual of instruction for his new literary procedure in the *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine experimentale* by Claude Bernard. Bernard was so much to the point that in taking over his ideas Zola needed to do little more than change the word "physician" to "novelist."[5]

> The experimental novel is a result of the scientific development which has occurred in this century; it is a continuation and complement to the science of physiology which in turn depends upon chemistry and physics; it substitutes for the study of man as an abstraction, man as a metaphysical entity, the study of the natural man, man as the subject of physico-chemical laws, a being determined by the influences of his environment.[6]

Or, as Zola expressed it in his "Plans" for a vast saga of determinism:

> Study men like simple elements and note the reactions.
>
> What matters most to me is to be purely naturalistic, purely physiological. Instead of having principles (royalism, Catholicism) I shall have laws (heredity, atavism). . . . I am satisfied to be a scientist, to tell of that which exists, while seeking the underlying reasons. . . . A simple exposé of the facts of a family by showing the interior mechanisms which direct them.[7]

[1] *Le Naturalisme au Théatre,* in *Le Roman Expérimental,* ed. Maurice le Blond (Paris, n.d.), p. 92.

[2] *Le Roman Expérimental,* ed. Maurice le Blond, p. 16: "*Dès qu'il a eu choisi son sujet, il est parti des faits observés, puis il a institué son expérience en soumettant Hulot a une série d'épreuves, en le faisant passer par certains milieux, pour montrer le fonctionnement du mécanisme de sa passion.*"

[3] P. 28. Gilbert and Kuhn, p. 484, quote by contrast the romantic nature worship and fetichism of Zola's *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret:* "Oh good Earth, take me, thou that art the common mother, the sole source of life, thou the eternal, immortal, where the soul of the world circles. . . ."

[4] P. 28: "*Etre maître du bien et du mal, régler la vie, régler la société, résoudre à la longue tous les problèmes du socialisme.*"

[5] P. 1: "*Ce ne sera donc qu'une compilation de textes;—le plus souvent, il me suffira de remplacer le mot 'médecin' par le mot 'romancier,' pour rendre ma pensée claire et lui apporter la rigeur d'une vérité scientifique.*"

[6] P. 27.

[7] Matthew Josephson, *Zola and His Time* (New York, *The Book League Monthly,* I, 1, November, 1928), pp. 97–8, quoting Zola's manuscript Plans for *La Fortune des Rougon,* in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

Perhaps the most instructive later variations on the theme occur in America during the years around the turn of the century—where, in the utterances of Howells, for instance, we may observe scientific realism in moderately developed conflict with genteel idealism, or where Frank Norris shows that the lustiest pursuit of naturalism is capable of fantastic, even Gothic, realizations. Norris' *Responsibilities of the Novelist*, 1903, is the American counterpart of Zola's *Le Roman Expérimental* and the vindication of Norris' own novels, with their Zolaesque accumulation of careful detail, their studious concern for environment as the shaper of character, for disease, for brutality and violence. His canvas was crowded not only with weakness and misery but with primitive strong men and robustly animal women. Wheat workers clash with railroad management in a frontier contest of gigantic—nearly cosmic—proportions and implications. He combined an aim at disinterested, scientific objectivity with an evolutionary optimism about the collective future of mankind which it was difficult for readers of Herbert Spencer in that era to escape. And so his theory was not uncorruptly naturalistic. In an early essay he wrote:

> The naturalist takes no note of common people, common in so far as their interests, their lives, and the things that occur in them are common, are ordinary. Terrible things must happen to the characters of the naturalistic tale. They must be twisted from the ordinary, wrenched from the quiet uneventful round of every-day life and flung into the throes of a vast and terrible drama that works itself out in unleashed passions, in blood, and in sudden death.[8]

"Norris," says a recent historian, "knew that naturalistic fiction was a peculiar kind of adventure story. To write such stories, it helped to be able to think of modern business men as the descendants of the aggressive Anglo-Saxons carrying out their fighting instincts, not in war, but in trade." Naturalism, Norris came to believe, "is a form of romanticism, not an inner circle of realism."[9]

"Naturalism" had all along made a strong claim to be socially oriented. It showed a modern conscience for the plight of the working

[8] Editorial in the San Francisco *Wave*, quoted by Franklin Walker, *Frank Norris: A Biography* (New York, 1932), p. 83. Cf. Charles Child Walcutt, "Frank Norris and the Search for Form," *University of Kansas City Review*, XIV (Winter, 1947), 126–36; and "Frank Norris on Realism and Naturalism," *American Literature*, XIII (March, 1941), 61–3, convincing observations on Norris' failure to shape his novels consistently on a philosophy of scientific determinism. Moral responsibility was always breaking in.

[9] William Van O'Connor, *An Age of Criticism, 1900–1950* (Chicago, 1952), p. 42. Our account of Norris is substantially indebted to O'Connor. Cf. Norris, *The Responsibilities of the Novelist* (New York, 1903), pp. 214–15: "Zola has been dubbed a Realist, but he is, on the contrary, the very head of the Romanticists."

classes. It dealt with ordinary folk here and now, or with the kind of destiny and problems that most people experienced, not with moated castles, elfin knights, exotic love stories, border outlaws, or any other fantasies dreamed out of the now irrelevant feudal past or invoked from parts of the world still under the spell of that past. That is, naturalism was contemporary and socially didactic. But whether it was in any very strict sense "natural" or "true," or scientifically real or true, might all along have been considered another question—with obvious embarrassments to an affirmative answer. Courbet's paintings no less than Frank Norris' novels exhibit a much clearer relation to a philosophy and a spirit than to either the 19th-century fact of photography or to any physically determinable features of French peasant life or of Chicago industrialism.

III

In Czarist Russia of the mid-19th-century,[1] a didactic theory of literature was strongly invited not only by political and social conditions but by the actual pre-eminence of a generation of socially conscious novelists. At the same time, Russian police censorship helped to make literary book reviewing a covert vehicle for much political, social, and moral criticism. The notion deeply inherent in German romantic literary historiography and in the ideology of romantic nationalism, that literature should be the expression of a national spirit (the symbol of the inner life of the nation, the national physiognomy), carried over into Russia in the writing of the first Russian critic to attain more than local importance, Vissarion Belinsky (1811–1848), and in that of his disciples who wrote during the decades following his death.[2] Marxist critics of the 20th century have looked back to Belinsky with reverence. The reviews and essays of Belinsky and his disciples deal with Pushkin, Gogol, Lermontov, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy according to increasingly rigorous standards of realism and social relevance. These critics were on the lookout for empirical reality, for the moment in history, for social and national needs, and for corresponding responsibilities in literature. They merged the classical norm of the universal

[1] This account of pre-Tolstoyan Russian critics follows manuscript chapters of the third volume of Professor René Wellek's *A History of Modern Criticism*, now in progress. See his "Social and Aesthetic Values in Russian Nineteenth-Century Literary Criticism (Belinskii, Chernyshevskii, Dobroliubov, Pisarev)," in *Continuity and Change in Russian and Soviet Thought*, ed. Ernest J. Simmons (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), pp. 381–97. Examples of Belinsky's criticism may be found in *Selected Philosophical Works*, translated anonymously (Moscow, 1948) and of Dobrolyubov's in *Selected Philosophical Essays*, ed. J. Fineberg (Moscow, 1948).

[2] Nikolay Chernyshevsky (1828–89), Nikolay Dobrolyubov (1836–61), Dmitri Pisarev (1840–68).

with romantic theories of mythopoeia in a pressing demand that the literary artist create human types according to new patterns of social significance. They considered that the only real literature was the expression of the historically developing national spirit, the dialectic movement of the political and economic idea. That movement provided a norm for distinguishing between the eternal and the ephemeral in literature. The greatest authors were the ones most closely identified with the community and its evolution, those who divined the needs of their time, expressed its spirit, represented their contemporaries. Belinsky's disciple Dobrolyubov was the originator of the idea that novelists might do this independently of, or even contrary to, their conscious intentions. The function of criticism might be to explain hidden social meanings. At the genetic level, these critics shifted the responsibility for the work of art from the artist to his age. They made it a pure result of the historical process. They conceived it more and more as an expression relentlessly forced up out of the national consciousness under pressure exerted by the stream of history. They saw inevitable sequences of literary genres (as from lyric to epic to drama) both in national history and in the growth of individual poets.

On occasions they appeared as reactionaries against romantic primitivism and specifically against folk poetry as a thing socially implicated in a serf-civilization, a survival from an undesirable and irrecoverable past. They were apt also to speak severely against "pure art" or the pleasure art of erotic and convivial themes, dissolute adventures. Pisarev, the most rigidly naturalistic monist of the group, the author of a notorious paper entitled "The Destruction of Aesthetics" (1865). reduced aesthetics to psychology and hygiene, observing that "every healthy and normal person is beautiful." He would concede some usefulness to the art of drawing, but only for the illustration of scientific books. He said that no man of that generation who had genuine intelligence and talent could spend his life "piercing sensitive hearts with iambs and anapests." The main technical emphasis of this whole family of critics was on a faithful naturalistic reporting, a lifelike rendition of the social organism, the stages of its development. Belinsky spoke of Russian writers since Gogol as the "natural school."

Belinsky himself did not propose any simply didactic aim, like the overthrow of autocracy or the emancipation of the serfs—though he moved in this direction and his disciples moved further. Compared with the French positivists, Saint-Simon, Proudhon, Comte, these Russian critics had less to say about the glorious didactic future of art, more about immediate sociological realism, but their social emphasis had deeply and enduringly didactic implications. In the work of Belinsky's disciples, deterministic materialism, hedonistic utilitarianism, and enlightened egoism unite paradoxically with fervor for social reform and a revolu-

tionary spirit of sacrifice and social optimism. They combine the view that any art which has ever been faithful to its historic moment has been for that reason right (even bad taste if pervasive enough expresses a spirit and a time) with a second view, sometimes not distinguished from the first, that the historic development of the mid-19th century is in itself a superior thing. Time and history take on the ambivalent character of an inevitable (blind and neutral) progression which is, however, in its present moment the only truth and is to be promoted with ardent loyalty.

IV

THE greatest Russian literary figure to participate in the 19th-century complex of socio-realistic theory and the writer whose pronouncements on art have impinged with most authority on the English literary mind, was undoubtedly Tolstoy—"the conscience of Russia" in his time, "the conscience of the world," "the conscience of humanity."[3] One might suppose offhand that Tolstoy could not very readily be assimilated to the materialistic trend of Russian social theory. He was in his middle age a violent convert to a certain kind of Christian thinking. A period of furious tractarian activity followed the production of the great novels. And it is a religious theory of literature that near the end of his life issues in his thunderously deliberate denunciation of all that he himself and all that European artists for 300 years had created. Tolstoy's *What Is Art?*, 1898, was published simultaneously in both Russian and English and was widely honored by English readers for its weight and elaboration and for its many passages of profound insight and passionate conviction. It pursued a religious argument—not, however, in the traditional sense. The religious feelings aroused in Tolstoy as he looks back over his career as liberal aristocrat and novelist run heavily counter to the established Christian institutions and to the whole cultural hierarchy related to them. The religion which appears in his tracts, beginning with *A Confession* in 1878,[4] and in all his essays on art, is a form of Christian anarchy, a wide and simple kind of religious feeling for the brotherhood of man and his common relation of sonship to God. Tolstoy's *What Is Art?* fits comfortably enough in the Russian complex, and Tolstoy too has his niche in the Marxist retrospect.

As a literary theorist, Tolstoy appears in the main tradition of emotive art theory developed during the 19th century along rather simple lines from the 18th-century concept which we have noted as late as the essays of Mill. But other versions of emotivism which appear during

[3] Cf. Ernest J. Simmons, *Leo Tolstoy* (Boston, 1946), p. 488; review by E. C. Ross, *Saturday Review of Literature*, XXX (January 18, 1947), 17.

[4] See Matthew Arnold's account of these in his long review of *Anna Karenina* included under the title *Count Leo Tolstoy* in *Essays in Criticism, Second Series.*

this era, and notably the expressionist theory of Véron,[5] have a more aesthetic orientation. Tolstoy's version is strongly anti-aesthetic. Art is to be known by its power of wholesome emotive "infection." He has a theory about the social function of art which invites comparison with the theories of Shelley and Comte. (Science, the pioneer thinker, is a little boat which takes kedge-anchors upstream to new positions; art is the windlass of moral energy which draws the barge up to the new positions. Chapter XX.)[6] And he more or less unwittingly accepts the paradox of the historically emergent new truth which we have noted among the earlier Russians.

There is a chapter (V) where Tolstoy first expounds his infection theory, and here he seems mainly to say that art transmits *emotion.* Then at the end of the same chapter he says that art transmits *religious* emotion. There are several other chapters (VI, IX, XI, XX) where he seems to say that art always transmits the genuine, the "fresh" religious emotion of any age. He uses such phrases as the "highest life-conception of a time" (XI), "the highest conception accessible to their age" (VI), "the highest level of life-comprehension" (IX). Finally, there is a chapter (XVI) where he says that the art of the *present* age must transmit only the progressive religious emotions of this age, those that relate to the universal brotherhood of man.[7]

Thus a problem arises (even though Tolstoy does not see it) concerning that which was once new but is now old.

> From the religious perception of the ancient Greeks flowed the really new, important, and endlessly varied feelings expressed by Homer and the tragic writers.—IX
>
> . . . good, supreme art; the Iliad, the Odyssey. . . . —X
>
> But the Christian idea changed and reversed everything, so that as the Gospel puts it, "That which was exalted among men has become an abomination in the sight of God." The ideal is no longer the greatness of Pharaoh or of a Roman emperor, not the beauty of a Greek nor the wealth of Phoenicia, but humility, purity, compassion, love.—XVI
>
> The artists of the Middle Ages, vitalized by the same source of feeling—religion—as the mass of the people, and transmitting

[5] Eugene Véron, *Aesthetics,* trans. W. H. Armstrong (London, 1879). Véron has optimistic evolutionary and secular millenarian views which are comparable to those of Tolstoy. "What shall we say, then, about the sentiments which are the true glories of our age,—charity, toleration, respect for womanhood, for childhood, and for human life? Pity for animals, is not that, too, a sign of the times?" (p. 353)

[6] See *What is Art? and Essays on Art,* trans. Aylmer Maude (Oxford: World's Classics, 1930).

[7] A second place is given to certain universally accessible, or folk, emotions—namely, merriment, pity, cheerfulness, and tranquillity (Ch. XVI).

> . . . the feelings and states of mind they experienced, were true artists; and their activity, founded on the highest conceptions accessible to their age and common to the entire people—though for our times a mean art—was nevertheless a true one, shared by the whole community.—VI
>
> European society [of the Renaissance] went back in their comprehension of art to the gross conception of the primitive Greeks, which Plato had already condemned.—VI
>
> . . . rude, savage, and for us, often meaningless works of the ancient Greeks: Sophocles, Euripides, Aeschylus. . . .—XII
>
> If by art it has been inculcated on people how they should treat religious objects, their parents, their children, their wives . . . and if this has been obeyed through generations by millions of people . . . then by art also other customs more in accord with the religious perception of our time may be evoked.—XX

Presumably the degenerate European art of Tolstoy's time would have been religious art in another era. And we are left with some question whether the religious perception of the new time is a genuine material for art because it is a better perception or because it is the latest.[8]

But Tolstoy is sufficiently compelling in his indictment of the effete emotions—the pride, sexual desire, and ennui which rule the upper-class patrons of the "pleasure arts" in his day. His walloping caricatures of metropolitan fashionable culture—the art show, the salon, the theater, the opera in rehearsal, art schools and art criticism—manage to suggest not only lavish waste and a measure of social injustice but a deplorable perplexity of aesthetic judgment and widespread vitiation of taste. He notices with scorn the new aesthetics of the lower senses—the five-sense aesthetics of gustatory, olfactory, and tactile pleasure which in that day was fulfilling the promise of 18th-century sensationalism and had some connection with the kinds of aesthetic autonomy then in vogue.[9] In short Tolstoy gives pointed expression to the difficult and permanent aesthetic problem whether a non-didactic or autonomous theory of art is bound to be merely a "hedonistic" or pleasure theory of art. He issues us an urgent invitation to ponder the validity of a café-society aesthetic devotion ranging from theater, orchestra, museum, and gallery, through opera and ballet, to the refinements of dinner with chartreuse, cigars, and music. *Aut prodesse . . . aut delectare*—Horace

[8] These paradoxes of post-Hegelian thinking are the paradigm for such quirks in later intellectual history as the appearance on the mid-20th-century American scene of the "premature" anti-communist, or the exclusive sanctity which the *Partisan* kind of liberalism confers upon the repentant Marxist.

[9] Cf. *post* Chapter 22, "Art for Art's Sake."

had given the poet his alternatives. Is there any other—aside from the merely mixed way of "winning all the votes" which Horace suggests? Must the interpretation of *delectare* incline to the frivolity of a merely sensate indulgence?

Tolstoy gives us another impressive set of negative judgments in a chapter (XI) on "counterfeit" art, under four main heads: "borrowing," "imitation," "striking," and "interesting." Or, in terms that may be nearer to our own minds: stock responses, local-color realism, pornography and horror, detective story plots. (Wagner's *Nibelungen Ring* is a model combination of the four ways!) Tolstoy is very pure, very austere, very acute in his opinion of what is not art, and very firm in his will to condemn it.

Yet his sternly exclusive standard would be even more impressive if he had left it less explicitly illustrated. For the application of the standard is horrifying in its sweep. The whole body of medieval, Renaissance, and modern European art—the work of Dante, Tasso, Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe, Raphael, Michelangelo, Bach, Beethoven, for instance (Chapter XII) [1]—is swept away, and with it the great novels of Tolstoy himself. He shows no compunction. "I belong," he says, "to the class of people whose taste has been perverted by false training" (XVI). He is willing to salvage only two of his simplest short stories: *God Sees the Truth but Waits*, the pathetic fable of a man railroaded to Siberia who, after growing old in the prison camp, discovers his enemy and forgives him; and *A Prisoner of the Caucasus*, a tender idyll, full of village and childhood colors, about a Russian officer captured by Tartars and helped to escape by a girl of the tribe.[2] Nearly forty years earlier Tolstoy had set up a school for peasant children in his ancestral estate at Yasnaya Polyana, and two boys Semka and Fedka had written for his school magazine stories which he called "in their way, equal to anything in Russian literature." It seemed to him "strange and offensive" that he "should hardly be able except at a happy moment of excitement to keep up with" these inspired peasant boys.[3] The simplicity, even sentimentality, of the aesthetic norm adopted by Tolstoy may be inspected in the half-tones which embellish Aylmer Maude's large edition of *What Is Art?*,[4] presenting examples of the pictorial art which Tolstoy at various places in his book selects for special commendation:—the peasant boy of Turgenev's story dreaming of the quail, the war widow

[1] Schiller, Hugo, Dickens, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Dostoevski, George Eliot, Cervantes, Molière, Gogol, Pushkin (Chap. XVI) have produced examples of art that *seem* good to Tolstoy, but he attaches no "importance" to his own taste.

[2] Tolstoy's Preface to another short story, Chekhov's *Darling*, argues, according to a principle we have noticed in the earlier Russian critics, that the author expresses a humanitarian meaning in his own despite.

[3] Aylmer Maude, *Life of Tolstoy*, vol. I, Chap. viii (World's Classics, c. 1930, I, 269–70).

[4] *Tolstoy on Art*, trans. Aylmer Maude (Boston, 1924).

weeping in the room behind the balcony overlooking the victory parade, the peasant girls giggling at a society huntsman, Russian peasants paying out money at a state liquor monopoly In religious painting Tolstoy preferred N. N. Gay's drably natural *Last Supper* and *What is Truth?* to Manet's Pre-Raphaelite *Angels at the Tomb of Christ.* Millet's *The Man with the Hoe* is an object of his preference which his editor seems to have thought it needless to illustrate.

Tolstoy's exclusiveness raises the difficult aesthetic problem of "communication." Art for whom? [5] A "country peasant of unperverted taste" will detect the genuine work of art easily and unerringly (XIV). And Tolstoy seems to assume that the numerous peasantry are far more likely than the few genteel folk actually to have an unperverted taste. "Unperverted" *means* in fact uncomplicated, ordinary. "Good, great, universal, religious art may be incomprehensible to a small circle of spoilt people, but certainly not to any large number of plain men" (X). The democratic consumers' argument which we have noted here and there in the past, in Longinus, in Castelvetro, in Samuel Johnson, arrives at its fullest realization in Tolstoy.

He applies the norm of easy comprehensibility with special satisfaction against the immediately contemporary "decadent" art which he is most bent on condemning. The truth about this art—the pictures in the Paris impressionist and symbolist exhibitions of 1894, the poetry of Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Verlaine, Maeterlinck—was that it was not only luxurious and effete but also impertinently obscure. It tried to elevate inaccuracy, indefiniteness, lack of eloquence into marks of esteem. Tolstoy's heavily documented attack on symbolist poetry (Chap. X) takes in, along with a difficult sonnet by Mallarmé and a perhaps tenuously rewarding lyric by Maeterlinck, several much easier pieces, including a prose poem by Baudelaire which one finds it almost impossible to believe offered any resistance at all to Tolstoy's penetration. "*Eh bien! cher ange*, je me figure que c'est vous! *Et il ferma les yeux et il lâcha la détente. La poupée fut nettement décapitée.*" The loosely associated ideas of the obscure and immoral in Tolstoy's treatment of symbolist poetry strongly invite us to understand that the flippancy is morally chaotic and, just in that sense, obscure too.[6] The broad thesis

[5] In one place (XV) he wants to make the infectiousness of art depend on "individuality" of feeling, on clarity, and on sincerity. The artist is infected by his own production; writes for himself. Hence he expresses something individual and something which because of its individuality is clear to his audience. The least little stroke, says Tolstoy, makes the difference (XII). But it is difficult to relate this norm to his broad demands for the religious emotion. Cf. his introduction to Semenov's *Peasant Stories.*

[6] The view could hardly be maintained with complete consistency. Tolstoy's Introduction to the *Works of de Maupassant*, 1894, for instance, seems to take Maupassant's intelligibility for granted, though laboring his immorality (*What is Art?* World's Classics ed., pp. 21, 26, 33, 39).

suggested, though never quite stated, is that the fault of obscurity in art is a fault of immorality—and conversely that immorality is a kind of obscurity. Obscurity means obscurantism, confusion, nihilism, the invocation of chaos.

Tolstoy had been reading Shakespeare all his life, in at least three languages, Russian, German, English. At the age of 75, five years after *What Is Art?*, provoked by an English article on "Shakespeare and the Working Classes," he re-read the whole of Shakespeare and responded with a tirade.[7] G. Wilson Knight in an *English Association Pamphlet, Shakespeare and Tolstoy*,[8] has perhaps done as much as anyone to explain some part of Tolstoy's views by relating them to the "rocklike simplicity" of Tolstoy himself as a master of the realistic novel. The symbolic technique and verse conventions of the Elizabethan drama threw him off so badly that he was unable, for instance, to perceive that Shakespeare's characters speak at all differently from one another.

> [Shakespeare] is lacking in the chief, if not the sole, means of portraying character, which is individuality of language—that each person should speak in a way suitable to his own character. . . . All his characters speak, not a language of their own but always one and the same Shakespearian, affected, unnatural language, which not only could they not speak, but which no real people could ever have spoken anywhere.
>
> Lear raves just as Edgar does when feigning madness. Kent and the fool both speak alike. The words of one person can be put in the mouth of another, and by the character of the speech it is impossible to know who is speaking.
>
> The person[9] uttering these various thoughts becomes a mere phonograph of Shakespeare, deprived of any character of his own.

And the deplorable social values reflected in Shakespeare's writing—the feudal respect for kings and dukes, the disesteem of the working classes!

> The content of Shakespeare's plays . . . is the lowest, most vulgar view of life, which regards the external elevation of the great ones of the earth as a genuine superiority; despises the crowd, that is to say, the working classes; and repudiates not only religious, but even any humanitarian, efforts directed toward the alteration of the existing order of society.

The rejection both of Shakespeare's artful intentions and of his artless accomplishment comes near to being total.

[7] *Shakespeare and the Drama*, published in 1906, essay XVII in *Tolstoy on Art*, ed. Aylmer Maude (Boston, 1924).

[8] No. 88, April 1934.

[9] Hamlet.

> The third and chief condition—sincerity—is totally absent in all Shakespeare's works. One sees in all of them an intentional artificiality; it is obvious that he is not in earnest but is playing with words.
>
> Whatever people may say, however they may be enraptured by Shakespeare's works, whatever merits they may attribute to him, it is certain that he was not an artist, and that his works were not artistic productions. . . . Shakespeare may be anything you like—only not an artist.[1]

V

THE destruction of the idea "art for art's sake" and the reconstruction of art as a monitor and propagandist for the social process is the gist of Tolstoy's preachment, and this has been also the monotonous burden of subsequent Marxist criticism in Russia and the instructed echoes of this in English and American writing which sounded in the later 1920's and the 1930's. In Marxist writing the basic theme has received a fanatically detailed articulation according to the philosophy of dialectical materialism. Prominent features have been (1) an emphasis on class propaganda and revolutionary didacticism and on the ideological specifications of the total state; (2) a corresponding emphasis on the deterministic origins of art—the economic and social status (proletarian, bourgeois, pseudo-bourgeois, or aristocratic) of artists and artisans in various past eras. Party-line writers have occasionally paused to disclaim any simple deterministic view of art, and they have done this in the name of Marx himself, who said: "Certain periods of highest development of art stand in no direct connection with the general development of society, nor with the material basis and the skeleton structure of its organization."[2] Yet the general mood of Marxism and of other kinds of social criticism, even the most conservative, does not make much room for such refinements. Shakespeare appeared because "we were just in a financial position to afford" him; he "flourished in the atmosphere of buoyancy, exhilaration and the freedom of economic cares felt by the governing class, which is engendered by profit inflations."[3] Or, on

[1] To Tolstoy's credit stands the following contradictory anecdote. "Once, when his friend Chekhov came to see him when he was ill in bed, he pressed the latter's hand at parting and said, 'Good-bye, Anton Pavlovich. You know how fond I am of you and how I detest Shakespeare. Still, he did write better plays than you do'" (Aylmer Maude, *Tolstoy on Art*, Boston 1924, p. 19).

[2] Ralph Fox, *The Novel and the People* (1937), Chap. I, in Mark Schorer *et al.*, *Criticism, The Foundations of Modern Literary Judgment*, pp. 134–7.

[3] John Maynard Keynes, *A Treatise on Money* (New York, 1930), II, 154, quoted by Wellek and Warren, p. 102.

the contrary: "Shakespeare's tragic outlook on the world was consequential upon his being the dramatic expression of the feudal aristocracy, which in Elizabeth's day had lost their former dominant position." [4]

According to the Marxist theory, English poetry of the 19th century has in one way or another shown the growing isolation of the modern artist from the bourgeois machine culture in which he was for a time seductively protected, his increasing anarchic agony, and his effort to renounce the culture in ways which have been only mirror images of it. He has lacked a systematic revolutionary outlook, the real rationale of insurgency which would have made him something positive, an affirmatively proletarian artist. In the 20th century T. S. Eliot is said to make the last decadent gesture of the mentality which has turned away from the historico-social reality and sought refuge in the ivory tower of poetry and beauty pure. Among the Russians, the socialist Georgi Plekhanov in his *Art and Society*, 1912–1913 (English translation, 1936), and Leon Trotsky in *Literature and Revolution*, 1923, have elaborated this basic view of the modern poet's isolation from reality. And Christopher Caudwell in *Illusion and Reality*,[5] 1937, has made the applications to English literature. In a call to the barricades which echoed for twenty years, Lenin cried out: "Down with supermen-litterateurs. . . . Literature must become a component part of the organized, planned, unified Socialist party work." [6]

Seen from the genetic point of view, Marxist criticism has some curious affinities. The professional literary student will scarcely be horrified by the bourgeois origin of a given literature; he is not likely to evaluate writers according to the degree of their integration in a totalitarian process, or to believe that the Bohemian, the *poète maudit*, the untrammeled genius is necessarily an artistic bungler. Yet the Marxist program for literature—if one leaves out of account its hortatory violence—is able to take its place with some comfort as an application of the historical idea which purely literary scholars in the tradition of Thomas Warton and Hippolyte Taine have worked out so successfully, for their own purposes, during the past 200 years.[7] The specifically Marxist genetic approach takes its place quite gracefully as one of that numerous kind in literary studies which has attended to social and economic origins—to the mark upon his work made by the professional status of the dithyrambic tragedian, the *Minnesänger*, the court dramatist, the Grubstreet hack, or the affluent 19th-century periodical

[4] Anatoli V. Lunacharsky, in *The Listener*, December 27, 1934, quoted by Wellek and Warren, p. 102.

[5] See Chapter VI, "English Poets: The Decline ot Capitalism," reproduced in Mark Schorer *et al.*, pp. 125–33.

[6] Quoted by W. V. O'Connor, *An Age of Criticism*, p. 115.

[7] Cf. *post* Chapter 24.

novelist.[8] It is less than a paradox that the Marxist critic, in all the severity of his logic, should have driven this method of the modern literary student to a conclusion that completely destroys the literary viewpoint.

Seen as a demand on the character of literature itself, Marxist criticism prescribes the broad picture of social reality, the novel of sound views, the social document, the party-line mimesis, the blue-print for social planning. And it equally proscribes the lyric cry, the personal relation, the individually intricate symbol, the detachment of contemplation, and any engagement that either bypasses or transcends the totalitarian social responsibility. It does not believe in the work of art. There is no good social art of the kind it prescribes. Under Marxism society itself "becomes the work of art." [9]

VI

In America the idea of a socially activist literature appears during the first decades of the 20th century with the "muckraking" movement (of which Upton Sinclair's *Mammonart*, 1924, may stand as the sufficient symbol) and after that in the overtly Marxist criticism of the later twenties and the thirties—the work of such writers as Michael Gold, editor of the *New Masses*, Joseph Freeman, editor of the anthology *Proletarian Literature in the United States*, 1935, and V. F. Calverton, editor of the *Modern Quarterly*. Here we meet a barefaced rehearsal of the whole canon of Marxist ideas—much about the pessimism and decay of the middle class, the inferiority of the "bourgeois sexual code," the modern sell-out of human values to the "burgher," much about the "creative role" of the worker and the need of the novelist to keep up with "the vanguard of the Proletariat." We hear that the experiments of Joyce, Eliot, and Cummings are misguided and incommunicative, that on the contrary Emerson had confidence in the common man, that Whitman enjoyed a kinship with workers and farmers and had glimpses of a collective society.[1] A major monument was Vernon Louis Parrington's three-volume *Main Currents in American Thought* (1927–1930), where "thought" is equated with literature, and the sufficient principle of economic determinism receives a value shading that is "liberal" and "Jef-

[8] Cf. Wellek and Warren, pp. 93–5. Brander Matthews, "The Economic Interpretation of Literary History," in his *Gateways to Literature and Other Essays* (New York, 1912), is a good American instance of this kind of inquiry.

[9] Edmund Wilson, quoted by W. V. O'Connor, *An Age of Criticism*, p. 126.

[1] W. V. O'Connor, *An Age of Criticism*, pp. 119–24, quoting, among other works, Calverton's *The Newer Spirit* (1925) and *The Liberation of American Literature* (1932), Granville Hicks's "The Crisis in Criticism" in the *New Masses* (1933) and *The Great Tradition: An Interpretation of American Literature Since the Civil War* (1933), and Bernard Smith's *Forces in American Criticism* (1939).

fersonian."[2] Parrington gives us the following flowers of the economic and realist spirit in criticism.

> The problem of Poe, fascinating as it is, lies quite outside the main current of American thought, and it may be left to the psychologist and the belletrist with whom it belongs.[3]

> Hawthorne was the extreme and finest expression of the refined alienation from reality that in the end palsied the creative mind of New England.[4]

> In his subtle psychological inquires, . . . [Henry James] remained shut up within his own skull-pan.[5]

Marxism and the forms of social criticism more closely related to it have never had any real concern with literature and literary problems. In this country the cause enlisted some keen journalistic and literary minds. But a number of them, like Max Eastman as editor of *The Masses*, avoided sociology in their literary criticism. Eastman shied away from doctrinal and scientific claims for literature and worked up a theory of vivid sensory realization that belongs rather in the tradition of art for art's sake. Edmund Wilson in *Axel's Castle*, 1931, made gestures acknowledging the social responsibility of the artist but only as if in atonement for his having dwelt at such length among the mysteries of symbolism. As early as the anthology acclaiming *Proletarian Literature* in 1935, the editors of the *Partisan Review* were observing a flow of "gush" and "invective," in place of analysis, and the exercise of Marxism as a "sentiment" rather than a "science." James T. Farrell's *A Note on Literary Criticism*, 1936, is a critique by an "amateur Marxist" of the party-line simplifications. By 1939 it was possible for the *Partisan* editor Philip Rahv to write an essay under the title "Proletarian Literature: A Political Autopsy."[6] Marxist naturalism persists in American letters today less as a proclaimed cause than as a deeply rooted sympathy (a Gnostic utopianism) ready with each shift in political or literary dialectics to exert itself in a new stratagem. Perhaps the notion of "myth," despite its Germanic, Jungian, and quasi-religious orientation, is the latest of these.[7]

[2] Parrington's Introduction to the first volume and E. H. Eby's Introduction to the posthumous third volume, quoted in W. V. O'Connor, *An Age of Criticism*, pp. 119–20; see also p. 123, the passages next quoted from Parrington.

[3] *Main Currents in American Thought* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., 1927–30), II, 58.

[4] II, 450.

[5] III, 241.

[6] *Southern Review*, IV (Winter, 1939), 616–28. Cf. Morton D. Zabel, *Literary Opinion in America* (New York, 1951), p. 36; Charles I. Glicksberg, *American Literary Criticism* (New York, 1952), pp. 46–52.

[7] Cf. *post* Chapter 31.

VII

THE main critical issue raised by the tradition of socio-realism—and this was apparent at least as far back as the indignation of Tolstoy over symbolist poetry—is that of "expression" and "communication." The bringing together of these two terms, one so strongly invoking the mind and inspiration of the artist, and the other so heavily entailing the receptivity and demands of the audience (what audience? communication to whom?), is today an especially important problem for the critic who believes in objective aesthetic values. But even the discussion of the problem (not to mention its solution) involves ideas of dramatic inclusiveness and artistic detachment which lie far beyond the range-finding sensitivity of the propagandist programs.

So far as the problem of poetic communication is peculiarly a social one, the opposing energies have been defined in our time with the most original insight by the philosopher Ortega y Gasset, in two complementary works. On the one hand he describes *The Revolt of the Masses*, a cultural phenomenon far more complicated than anything envisaged by the Marxist mind, and appearing in one of its aspects as a vast increase in the number and confidence of uneducated readers.

> Today we are witnessing the triumphs of a hyperdemocracy. . . . the present-day writer, when he takes his pen in hand to treat a subject which he has studied deeply, has to bear in mind that the average reader, who has never concerned himself with this subject, if he reads does so with the view, not of learning something from the writer, but rather, of pronouncing judgment on him when he is not in agreement with the commonplaces that the said reader carries in his head. If the individuals who make up the mass believed themselves specially qualified, it would be a case merely of personal error, not a sociological subversion. *The characteristic of the hour is that the commonplace mind, knowing itself to be commonplace, has the assurance to proclaim the rights of the commonplace and to impose them wherever it will.* . . . The mass crushes beneath it everything that is different, everything that is excellent, individual, qualified and select. Anybody who is not like everybody, who does not think like everybody, runs the risk of being eliminated.[8]

And on the other hand, there appears the exclusiveness and withdrawal of the modern artist in search of a fresh vision, a process which Ortega calls *The Dehumanization of Art.*

[8] *The Revolt of the Masses*, Chapter I (Mentor Book, 1952), p. 12. By permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. The Spanish version appeared in 1930.

> Romanticism was the prototype of a popular style. First-born of democracy, it was coddled by the masses.
>
> Modern art, on the other hand will always have the masses against it. It is essentially unpopular; moreover, it is antipopular.
>
> . . . . the split occurs in a deeper layer than that on which differences of personal taste reside. It is not that the majority does not *like* the art of the young and the minority likes it, but that the majority, the masses, do not *understand* it.
>
> But such a thing cannot be done after a hundred years of adulation of the masses and apotheosis of the people. Accustomed to ruling supreme, the masses feel that the new art, which is the art of a privileged aristocracy of finer senses, endangers their rights as men. Whenever the new Muses present themselves, the masses bristle.[9]

Marxism considers modern vulgar art to be a feat of the bourgeoisie, and the revolt of the romantic artist to be a weak anarchic effort which mirrors in negative the same standards. The literary critic, or the metaphysician, of more classical perspective is likely to look on the Marxist alternative as itself a mirror revolution of socialized materialism against privately competitive materialism. In the crudity both of its determinism and of its inconsistent propagandism, the socio-realistic tradition of literary criticism has on the whole contributed little to an understanding of the relation which universality bears to individuality in artistic expression.

SUPPLEMENT

A laissez faire economy such as was dominant in the recent past is basically hostile to great art. "As in economics, so in art: laissez-faire within a capitalist economy (or within any economy) merely abandons art to the chances of unrestricted competition, and the devil take the hindmost. It means that art becomes one more commodity on the free market, and that to succeed it must practice all the wiles of salesmanship—mass appeal, sex appeal, adulteration, and the sacrifice of quality to cheapness." (Herbert Read, "Culture and Liberty," *Nation*, CLII, April 2, 1941, p. 438). On the other hand, a general-welfare-society, such as has been lately envisioned widely is, I believe, in principle, fertile soil for the realization of the ideal of art. . . .

[9] *The Dehumanization of Art and Notes on the Novel*, trans. Helene Weyl (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), pp. 5–7. Cf. Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London, 1932).

Something of this sort, a beginning at least in certain directions, seems to have happened in Russia as it has struggled to its feet, following revolution, in recent decades. The arts there have had a position not unlike that in the best "organic" societies. They have been integrated with institutions enshrining a widely supported unity of belief. They have had not only official but immense popular support. The artist has been held in the highest esteem. His training has been anxiously attended to. He himself has enjoyed great respect and prestige. He has dedicated himself to the enrichment of the life of all the people. Commercialism between artist and audience has been eliminated and the disposition toward official interference, although certainly far from nonexistent, has been felt adversely far less than is commonly believed. The arts have been carried to the factories and farms and the remotest villages, and the great figures of art, such as the Pushkins and the Gorkys, are among the greatest national heroes. Nor have the arts been made the tool of merely "nationalistic" interests, although the relation of the arts to the life of the people has been kept immediate and evident. Traveling historical museums and theaters have penetrated into all parts of the country, the arts of all mankind have been displayed and studied, and sometimes a non-Russian artist has become as great a hero as the greatest of Russians, e.g., Shakespeare as great as Pushkin.

—D. W. Gotshalk, *Art and the Social Order* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1947), pp. 236–8. Copyright (1947) by the University of Chicago. A footnote on p. 238 cites as authorities for the view presented a generous selection of volumes dated in the 1930's.

CHAPTER 22

ART FOR ART'S SAKE

§ *aesthetic autonomy, early modern hints, German idealism, an ambiguous ground, Benjamin Constant, Bourbon restoration, Madame de Staël, Cousin and Iouffroy, "German aesthetics," freedom, art for art's sake, a commonplace—II. an atmospheric idea, E. A. Poe, blend of sources,* Philosophy of Composition, Poetic Principle, *diffuse Kantian elements, "Supernal Beauty," beauty an effect, different from passion and truth, the fate of M. Valdemar, importance of Poe—III. affinity for Baudelaire, beauty and evil, morality penetrates art, Poe and human anomaly, flowers of evil, "Epilogue." original sin, the "magic" of art,* Eloge du Maquillage, *art not illusion, Parnassian formalism—IV. aestheticism in England, Arnold's judgment, Swinburne's* Poems and Ballads (*1866*), *revolt from "middle class" moralism, "practical aestheticism," Wilde,* De Profundis, *dandyism, "art," "beauty," "sensation," "passion," Pater,* The Renaissance, *"gem-like flame," theory of moral subject matter (Ruskin), aesthetic counter theories: (1) "slim gilded feet," (2) indifference to subject, "negative capability" (Keats), Poe again,* vita contemplativa—*V pure "form," Wilde,* Intentions, *craftsmanship, verse technique, English "Parnassians,"* rondeau, ballade, *etc., poetry and other arts again, Gautier's* Emaux et Camées, *Pater,* Améthystes *and* Intaglios, *Whistler's "Arrangement in Black and Gray," Roger Fry and Clive Bell, exclusiveness and abstraction, "significant form," warning for literary theory—VI. Whistler,* Gentle Art of Making Enemies, *nature imitates art,* Florentine Nights, *Wilde,* Decay of Lying (*anthology of passages*), *impressionist criticism, Lamb, Hazlitt, Sainte-Beuve,* et al., *soul among masterpieces, sensibility, Wilde,* The Critic as Artist, *the argument full circle: Arnold and Wilde the sons of F. Schlegel* §

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THE REVOLUTIONARY VINDICATION OF POETRY BY GERMAN ROMANTICS and their followers resulted during the 19th century, as we have been seeing, in at least three main types of poetic theory which made claims upon ethics and politics. These were the Shelleyan and Carlylean rhapsodic retort to scientism, the Arnoldian neo-classic idealism, and the socio-realistic propagandism generated in Germany, Russia, and France. But the reassertion of poetic rights could take yet another turn, antithetic to the didacticism inherent in all those other three. Poetry—or art in general—might draw off by itself and be content with an emphatic assertion of autonomy—its own kind of intrinsic worth, to be understood and savored by its own devotees. It could be set up as a legitimate pursuit, apart from, and perhaps even in defiance of, the rival norms of ethics and politics.

This notion of art as a terminal value had appeared even during antiquity in the alternative offered the poet, *aut prodesse aut delectare*. It had gained a gradual and subtle emphasis in all those Renaissance versions of classic theory which reversed the usual formula to say that pleasing was somehow more important than teaching or was somehow the end aimed at through teaching. And such approaches to a theory of aesthetic autonomy gained greatly during the 18th century as literary theory first retreated from classical didacticism and then, after following Leibnizian and Lockean psychological lines, reacted against these too, shifting an emphasis on sensory and emotive pleasure toward various conceptions of "taste," inner sense, the absolute beauty of order and harmony, and pleasure without desire. The ideas of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and other British aesthetic writers were paralleled in France and Germany by Diderot, Sulzer, Mendelssohn, and many others.[1] The transcendental synthesis of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* summarized all such trends and first lent weighty metaphysical authority to the pure aesthetic claim. The mythopoeic and symbolist doctrines of German idealist critics, by generally strengthening the position of art, provided an area of mobilization not only for the didactic claims which we have seen but for the characteristically 19th-century reaction to didacticism which moved under the aegis of art for art's sake. Either development was a more or less legitimate, if simplistic, move from the German positions. There was a fundamental uncertainty in the claim of art to create meanings, to mark out pathways of knowledge, which led perhaps inevitably toward multiple forms both of didacticism and of autonomism.

The French *littérateur* Benjamin Constant, attaching himself to

[1] Diderot's article "*Beau*" in the *Dictionnaire Encyclopédique*, 1751; J. G. Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen Künste*, 1771–1774; Moses Mendelssohn, *Die Morgenstunden*, 1785. See Wellek, *History* I, 54, 149; and *ante* Chapter 13, pp. 276–7.

German literary circles in the year 1804, gives us in his *Journal intime* (not published until many years later) a casual glimpse of how the phrase "art for art's sake" may have begun to develop out of Kantian doctrine in Weimar-Jena discussions.

> Schiller calls. He is a man of keen mind in his art but almost wholly the poet. . . . I have a visit with [Henry Crabb] Robinson, pupil of Schelling's. His work on the *Esthetics* of Kant has some very forceful ideas. *L'art pour l'art* without purpose, for all purpose perverts art. But art attains the purpose that it does not have.[2]

With the return to Paris of intellectualist emigrés (among them Constant and his friend Madame de Staël) and the Bourbon restoration in 1814, began the era of a new and vaguely Kantian aesthetic in France. In the account of Kantian thought contained in Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne*,[3] first brought to Paris from England in 1813, in the exciting lectures of Victor Cousin at the Sorbonne during 1816–1818,[4] and in those of his pupil Jouffroy, the key ideas, or at least the key rubrics, of the new aesthetics were first popularized. On a tide of vaguely simplified Kantian thinking such terms as "German aesthetics," "Kant's aesthetics," "freedom," "disinterestedness," "pure art," "pure beauty," "form," and "genius" were floated into currency, and along with them the term "art for art's sake." It appeared in print perhaps for the first time in a journalistic skirmish of 1833.[5] In the Preface to his *Premières poésies*, 1832, Gautier, it is true, was able to pronounce his defiance of economists, utilitarians, utopians, Saint-Simonians, and all others of their purposeful kind without once invoking the term. ("What end does this book serve? It serves the end of being beautiful?") But in his article entitled "*Du Beau dans l'art*," appearing in the *Revue des deux mondes* during 1847, *l'art pour l'art* seems to enjoy the status of a recently established commonplace—"cette formule devenue *célèbre par des polémiques*."[6]

II

It is not, however, in the history of the term "art for art's sake" only, nor in the French school of aesthetic thinking only, that we may observe

[2] D. Melagari, *Journal Intime de Benjamin Constant* (Paris, 1895), p. 7, entry for February 10, 1804. Quoted by John Wilcox, "The Beginnings of *L'Art pour l'Art*," *JAAC*, XI (June, 1953), 360.

[3] *De l'Allemagne* (Paris, 1820), II, 290 ff. Wilcox, p. 365.

[4] Cousin's lectures were edited by his pupils from his class notes and printed twenty years later, 1836–42. See the exposition by Wilcox, pp. 367–8.

[5] Hippolyte Fortoul, in *La Revue Encyclopédique*, LIX, 109. Wilcox, p. 371.

[6] Wilcox, pp. 371, 376. Cf. Gautier's Preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, 1834.

the development of that formula. The new idea spread out pervasively and subtly; it was atmospheric. Shortly before the middle of the century, one of the most theatrical presentations occurs in the essays and reviews of the American Gothic story-teller and poet Edgar Allan Poe. Poe's critical origins were at first confusedly Coleridgean and Wordsworthian, with considerable borrowing from the English translation of A. W. Schlegel's *Dramatic Lectures.*[7] He cherished ideas of lyric brevity, unity of interest, "indefinite" pleasure, music, beauty. Later, on reviewing a volume of the new phrenology, he picked up a physico-psychological support for his sympathies, in the notion of a "Faculty of Ideality—which is the sentiment of Poesy." After 1840 he apparently became acquainted with Shelley's rhapsodic defence of romantic imagination. Only in his last efforts, the genetic tour de force entitled *The Philosophy of Composition* (or how he went about thinking up *The Raven*) and his last lecture, posthumously published in 1850, *The Poetic Principle*, does the full luxuriance of Poe's opinion bloom.[8] We discover pronounced, if diffuse and vaporous, Kantian elements in Poe's system: a division of the world of mind into pure intellect, taste, and moral sense (with taste the intermediary between the other two); a Kantian lack of esteem for mere reproduction of "beautiful" sounds, colors, and odors; a general dreamy volume of enthusiasm for the beautiful and the sublime and for the ethereal or supernal—for "Supernal Beauty." (Tennyson[9] is the noblest poet who ever lived, because the most "ethereal.")

> Inspired by an ecstatic prescience of the glories beyond the grave, we struggle, by multiform combinations among the things and thoughts of Time, to attain a portion of that Loveliness whose very elements, perhaps, appertain to eternity alone.
>
> *That* pleasure which is at once the most pure, the most elevating, and the most intense, is derived, I maintain, from the contemplation of the Beautiful. In the contemplation of Beauty we alone find it possible to attain that pleasurable elevation, or excitement, *of the soul*, which we recognize as the Poetic

[7] Cf. Albert J. Lubell, "Poe and A. W. Schlegel," *JEGP*, LII (January, 1953), 1–12.

[8] See Poe's *Critical Essays*, ed. F. C. Prescott (New York, 1909), pp. xxx, 9–10; Floyd Stovall, "Poe's Debt to Coleridge," *Studies in English*, No. 10, *The University of Texas Bulletin*, July 8, 1930, pp. 70–127; Marvin Laser, "The Growth and Structure of Poe's Concept of Beauty," *ELH*, XV (March, 1948), 69–84.

[9] Poe's book reviews by and large look down upon the poetry of the 16th and 17th centuries. Poetry began for him with Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats (Prescott, p. xxix). The norm of lovely melancholy, developed so dramatically in *The Philosophy of Composition*, appears earlier in his Drake-Halleck review (*Southern Literary Messenger*, April, 1836) along with the dogma that everything ludicrous is "utterly at war with the Poetic Sentiment" and with the sentiments of the "mystical" and the "august," which raise "fancy" to imagination (Laser, pp. 73–4).

> Sentiment. . . . I make Beauty, therefore—using the word as inclusive of the Sublime—I make Beauty the province of the poem.[1]

But where is "beauty" located? Where but in the very experience of itself? "When, indeed, men speak of Beauty they mean, precisely, not a quality. . . . but an effect—they refer, in short, just to that intense and pure elevation of *soul* . . . which is experienced in consequence of contemplating 'the beautiful.'" [2] A certain amalgam or association of subject matters—the beautiful and the melancholy when these are "rhythmically created" [3] in a poem—produces in the reader that pleasurable elevation of soul which itself should justly be known as beauty.[4] Such devotion to "supernal beauty" entails a resolute disapproval of "passion" and, of course, a strict anti-didacticism.

> The manifestation of the [aesthetic] Principle is always found in *an elevating excitement of the Soul*—quite independent of that passion which is the intoxication of the Heart—or of that Truth which is the satisfaction of the Reason.
>
> For, in regard to Passion, alas! its tendency is to degrade, rather than to elevate the Soul.
>
> I allude to the heresy of *The Didactic*. . . . We Americans, especially, have patronised this happy idea; and we Bostonians, very especially, have developed it in full.[5]

There is much to Poe's credit in these latter Kantian clauses. Still the general picture is hazy. Ethereal vagueness and melancholy, evaporations of languorous and pallid loveliness wreathe the figure of Poe. His poems—*Ulalume*, *The Raven*, *Al Aaraaf*, *The City in the Sea*, *The Sleepers*, *Fairy-Land*—are softened and simplified counterparts of Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*, *The Ancient Mariner*, *Christabel*, and *Youth and Age*. Poe's theoretical essays bear the same relation to chapters of Coleridge's *Biographia*. Neo-classic theory, in a way peculiar to itself, had rigidified or petrified, then dilapidated. Romantic theory did not do that. But in some of its inheritors it did liquefy or even vaporize. Poe's ideas are Kantian and Coleridgean aesthetic undergoing the fate of M. Valdemar. These writers deserved and got better epigonists. But Poe has become one of the most conspicuous, and his very existence

[1] *The Poetic Principle.*

[2] *The Philosophy of Composition.*

[3] "I would define, in brief, the Poetry of words as *The Rhythmical Creation of Beauty*" (*The Poetic Principle*). The emphasis on musicality and rhythm in Poe's last essays no doubt owes something to Shelley.

[4] See the analysis of this circularity by Charles C. Walcutt, "The Logic of Poe," *College English*, II (February, 1941), 438–44.

[5] *The Poetic Principle.*

says something of the era which they ushered in. It is possible to rate Poe up or down. It is difficult to avoid him. His criticism, said Henry James, is "probably the most complete and exquisite specimen of *provincialism* ever prepared for the edification of men." [6] He was, says T. S. Eliot, "not only an heroically courageous critic . . . but a critic of the first rank." [7]

III

It is a source of wonder to comparatists, but an inescapable fact, that the "exquisite provincialism" of Poe should have been highly relished by a spirit so sophisticated as Charles Baudelaire. The literary connection is underscored by the biographical: the sympathy to the degree of identification which Baudelaire felt for Poe, the reading of his own fate in Poe's supposedly aristocratic and feudal flight from American popular culture and in his supposedly ratiocinative discipline of mind so luridly contrasting to his nervous weakness, his dipsomania and wandering.

The title of Baudelaire's collected poems, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, stands as a ready brief symbol for the aesthetic devotion, the belief in beauty despite evil—in beauty through evil—which makes a large part in the reputation of Baudelaire. Yet Baudelaire was a critical essayist and journalist whose ideas one can hardly constrict within any of the simpler versions of art for art's sake. On the issue, baldly stated, whether art can escape the claims of morality, Baudelaire had a complex view. He alternates between the claim that his own poetry is "*un livre d'art pur*" and the opposite claim that it is a moral statement.[8] In other connections he comes out often enough against the current formulations of pure-art theory.

> The childish utopianism of the school of *art for art's sake*, in ruling out morals . . . was doomed to sterility. Art for art's sake was a flagrant defiance of human nature. On the authority of the higher and universal principles of life itself, we must convict the movement of heresy.[9]

> The feverish passion for art cankers and devours all else. And this . . . means the disappearance of art itself. The wholeness

[6] *Hawthorne* (New York, 1879), p. 62. James refers specifically to Poe's criticism of his American contemporaries.

[7] Review of *Israfel* by Hervey Allen, in *The Nation and Athenaeum*, XLI (May 2, 1927), 219.

[8] Marcel Françon, "Poe et Baudelaire," *PMLA*, LX (September, 1945), 841.

[9] *L'Art Romantique*, in *Oeuvres Complètes de Charles Baudelaire*, ed. Jacques Crépet, III (Paris, 1925), 184.

> of the human being disintegrates. The specialization of a single faculty contracts toward nothingness.[1]
>
> Morality does not appear with a formal title. Morality simply penetrates and blends itself with art as completely as with life itself. The poet is a moralist in spite of himself, simply through the overflowing abundance of his nature.[2]

Yet it would have been one thing for a Shelley, an Arnold, or a Tolstoy to have uttered statements like these; it was another thing for Baudelaire. Take them in the context of the essays in which they appear and of other essays by Baudelaire, and we see that here is a different enough accent from that of the didactic defenders of poetry. The accent, despite the concern for morals, is in a very special way on art itself. Perhaps the shade of emphasis comes from the cumulative coloring of passages rather than from any definitely abstract key terms.

> It is imagination which has taught man the moral values of color, shape, sound, and perfumes. At the beginning of the world, imagination created analogy and metaphor. Imagination dissolves all creation. Remassing and reordering her materials by principles which come out of the depths of the human soul, imagination makes a new world, even a new realm of sensory experience. And as imagination has created this world (one may say this, I think, even in a religious sense), it is appropriate that the same faculty should govern it.[3]
>
> Is there any such thing as a pernicious work of art? There is. It is one which distorts the patterns of living reality. . . . If a novel or a play is well made, it can be an invitation to nobody to deviate from the law of nature. The first requirement for a healthy art is a belief in an ordered whole of experience. I challenge anybody to show me a single work of imagination which satisfies the requirements of beauty and is at the same time pernicious.[4]

A passage from one of the three essays which Baudelaire wrote on Poe shows something of how the doctrine of moral order in art might relate to the artistic use of materials of a strikingly disordered sort. "That peculiar genius" of Poe's, Baudelaire writes, "that unique temperament enabled him—in a style at once impeccable and horribly compelling—to unfold the image of irregularity in the moral order. Let me repeat: no-

[1] *L'Art Romantique, Oeuvres,* III, 296.
[2] *L'Art Romantique, Oeuvres,* III, 382.
[3] *Salon de 1859,* in *Curiosités Esthétiques, Oeuvres Complètes* ed. Jacques Crépet, II (Paris, 1923), 274.
[4] *L'Art Romantique, Oeuvres,* III, 284.

body has had a more magical success in the portrayal of the human anomaly." [5] The magic of the anomaly, the burnished glow of perversion, the flowers out of evil, seem intrinsic to the Baudelairean vision of poetry as moral expression.

Epilogue

With heart at rest I climbed the citadel's
  Steep height, and saw the city as from a tower,
Hospital, brothel, prison, and such hells,

Where evil comes up softly like a flower,
  Thou knowest, O Satan, patron of my pain,
Not for vain tears I went up at that hour;

But, like an old and faithful lecher, fain
  To drink delight of that enormous trull
Whose hellish beauty makes me young again.

Whether thou sleep, with heavy vapors full,
  Sodden with day, or, new appareled, stand
In gold-laced veils of evening beautiful,

I love thee, infamous city! Harlots and
  Hunted have pleasures of their own to give,
The vulgar herd can never understand.[6]

The speaker asserts, without shame, his love for the infamous city, the enormous trull. Without shame? Yes, but not without something else, akin to shame, a luridly stated awareness that here is something shameful. There is more moral interest here than in certain simpler kinds of naturalistic celebration.

The German romantic and the Coleridgean versions of the creative power of poetry had moved toward closing the distance between art and nature, or toward elevating art into a higher and more ideal nature. Art was opposed to the artificial. In some instances the enterprise was to return art to the "nature" of a primitive unspoiled honesty. Such theory was part either of a radical optimism about the progress that could be made by the human imagination, or of an ironic self-assurance in the face of cosmic insufficiency. The romantic imagination did not believe in original sin. Nature was good. Quite the contrary with Baudelaire. The integration of which he speaks in some of the passages quoted above was to be a kind of preternatural transcendence—the "magic" of art—even if diabolical. The morality which Baudelaire conceives is something to

[5] *Edgar Poe, Sa Vie et Ses Oeuvres*, in *Histoires Extraordinaires par Edgar Poe, Oeuvres*, ed. Jacques Crépet, VIII (Paris 1932), xxviii–xxix.

[6] The translation of Arthur Symons.

which art may characteristically attain—but not naked nature. The poetry of Baudelaire despises vegetable fertility, clumps of trees and bushes. His ideal city has no plant life.

"Most false ideas about the beautiful," says Baudelaire in his essay *In Praise of Face Paint* (*Eloge du Maquillage*),[7] "arise from the false idea of morality current during the 18th century. In that age the foundation, source, and archetype of all good and all possible beauty was seen in Nature. In the universal blindness of the age the denial of original sin was a thing that passed without notice."

> Nature! That infallible goddess! It is she who has given us parricide and cannibalism and a thousand other abominations which it would be indelicate even to name. On the other hand we have philosophy (I mean right philosophy) and religion. It is these that tell us to take care of our parents when they are old and poor. (Nature, the voice of our self-interest, tells us to bludgeon them.) Take a critical look at what is natural, the actions and desires of the purely natural man. The view is ghastly. Absolutely everything that is beautiful and noble proceeds from reasonable reflection.

These general principles afford Baudelaire the opportunity to erect an extravagantly gilded little shrine around the civilized figure of the well made-up woman.

> It is the right of woman and her duty to give herself a magical finish, a supernatural lustre. She is expected to astonish and charm us. She is a kind of idol, and she ought to gild herself (*se dorer*) until she is a fit object of our adoration (*pour être adorée*).
>
> Rouge and mascara are the symbols of a heightened, a preternaturally intense mode of existence. The dark framing renders the gaze more profound and individual; it deepens the character of the eye as a window opened into infinity. The hectic color on the cheek increases the brilliance of the eye and creates in a feminine countenance of sufficient loveliness the mysteriously passionate look of the priestess.

Baudelaire is at pains to point out that he is not talking about art as mimesis. "I am not trying to assign art the sterile function of imitating nature." Even less, if possible, can there be any question of art as illusion. "There is no point at all in trying to hide cosmetic or make it pass unnoticed. It ought to proclaim itself—if not boastfully, at least with a de-

[7] This appeared in *Le Figaro*, December 3, 1863, as No. 11 in a series entitled *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne*. The text may be found in *L'Art Romantique, Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. Jacques Crépet, III (Paris, 1925), 95–100.

gree of candor." Art, then, is a magical enhancement. But of what? The end of the argument may entail a certain contradiction of the initially dark view of nature. The anciently enlisted virgins of Crotona play a new role, it is true. But they have not been entirely eliminated from the theory. "Cosmetic artifice cannot improve ugliness. It can only serve what is to begin with beautiful." Baudelaire, in being less than a pure theorist of pure art, is one of the witnesses for the theory most worthy of our respectful attention.

With Baudelaire, the main fight for "art" in 19th-century France was won. After him, the simply aesthetic assertion fritters away into *Parnassien* formalism, the exoticism, the intricate versification of Leconte de Lisle or Théodore de Banville.[8] The main line of French poetry and poetics, with Verlaine and even more with Mallarmé, advances into subtler themes of musical intimation, ironic finesse, and symbol—above all else, symbol.[9] The simpler campaign of art for art's sake during the second half of the 19th century is carried with most flourish into the new territory of England.

IV

AESTHETICISM in England, says a recent writer, "was not a sudden development: the nature of the trend from Keats through Tennyson and Dante Gabriel Rossetti was, even in Arnold's mid-career, not unapparent to the critic who passed the judgment on the great Romantics. The insistence that poetry must be judged as 'criticism of life' is the same critic's reaction to the later Romantic tradition; it puts the stress where it seemed to him that it most needed to be put." [1] Arnold himself has left us such statements as the following in his Preface to Wordsworth (1879):

> Morals are often treated in a narrow and false fashion; . . . they grow tiresome to some of us. We find attraction, at times, even in a poetry of revolt against them; in a poetry which might take for its motto Omar Khayam's words: "Let us make up in the tavern for the time which we have wasted in the mosque." Or we find attraction in a poetry indifferent to them; in a poetry where the contents may be what they will, but where the form is studied and exquisite. We delude ourselves in either case; and the best cure for our delusion is to let our minds rest upon that

[8] The idea of art for art's sake can be seen, of course, in other places. It mixes with realistic theory, for instance, in the letters of Flaubert. See Gilbert and Kuhn, pp. 490–8.

[9] Cf. *post* Chapter 26.

[1] F. R. Leavis, *Scrutiny*, VII (December, 1938), 324–5.

> great and inexhaustible word *life*, until we learn to enter into its meaning. A poetry of revolt against moral ideas is a poetry of revolt against life; a poetry of indifference towards moral ideas is a poetry of indifference towards life.[2]

An abrupt separation of the artist from the "middle-class" world, and from "middle-class" moralism[3]—or, as it might be conceived in a somewhat different way, his revolt from subservience to the masses and the norms of industrial civilization—was signalized in England by the publication of Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads*, a volume read aloud with excited devotion by Saintsbury and other undergraduate literati at Oxford in the fall of 1866.[4] The "lithe limbs," the "strange, great sins," the *laus veneris*, the dolors, were the more musically vague and voluptuous counterpart in English of the evils which had recently flowered in France, the paganism of Gautier, the satanism of Baudelaire. During the next three decades the theoretical watchwords of the movement were sounded most loudly by three authors: by Pater, by Whistler (who took legal action against the moralist criticism of Ruskin), and by Wilde. The essays of Wilde collected as *Intentions* in 1891 form perhaps the most imposing theoretical monument.

On the side of "practical aestheticism," the artist's acting out of his theory in his own life, the later phase shows us some repetitions and some prettifications of the earlier. Baudelaire's explorations of vice, his decline, and early death are matched in England by Wilde's perversion, his trial, disaster, and death. "I treated art," he says in his *De Profundis*, "as the supreme reality and life as a mere mode of fiction."[5] De Quincey's essay "On Murder, Considered as One of the Fine Arts" is paralleled from the life in Stevenson's "Villon, Student, Poet and Housebreaker" and in the study "Pen, Pencil, and Poison" which Wilde includes in his *Intentions*. A conspicuous feature of the movement is a kind of aesthetic dandyism, an exquisiteness of dress and carriage no less than of the inner life—men in velvet jackets and knee breeches, with a flower in the hand,[6] women in lovely, flowing Pre-Raphaelite gowns. These pursue the vocation of adoring beauty.

The theory of the art object itself during the English phase dwelt intently on the terms "art" and "beauty." "Beauty" was something very pure, very different from everything else. So was "art." "Beauty," said

[2] *Essays in Criticism, Second Series* (London, 1888), p. 144.

[3] In France, the enemies during this period were the positive philosophy of Comte and the "bourgeois" society of the Second Empire.

[4] Cf. Dorothy Richardson, "Saintsbury and Art for Art's Sake in England," *PMLA*, LIX (March, 1944), 245–6.

[5] *De Profundis* (New York, 1950), p. 77.

[6] "With a poppy or a lily in your medieval hand" (W. S. Gilbert, *Patience*, in *Plays and Poems*, New York, 1932, p. 200).

Wilde, "is the symbol of symbols. Beauty reveals everything, because it expresses nothing."[7] And: "All art is useless."[8] Art, said Whistler in his *Ten O'Clock Lecture* of 1888, is:

> selfishly occupied with her own perfection only—having no desire to teach—seeking and finding the beautiful in all conditions and in all times.[9]

Still the "beauty" of art for art's sake was far from being a cold or Platonic idea. It has to be reconciled somehow with two very hot ideas, near the center of the theory; namely, "sensation" and "passion"—or "sensation" intensified by "passion." (So far have we come from Kant and Poe!) The "hard, gem-like flame" of "ecstasy" with which we are asked to "burn" in the well-known Conclusion of Pater's *Renaissance* wears the aura of a flickering sensationalism—a philosophy of the fleeting moment—so scandalous to his contemporaries that this Conclusion was omitted in the second edition.

> Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. A certain number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses? How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?

The answer lies in the word "passion." "Great passions may give us this quickened sense of life. . . . Only be sure it is passion. . . . Of such wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for its own sake, has most." Or, as Wilde would put it:

> Emotion for the sake of emotion is the aim of art, and emotion for the sake of action is the aim of life.[1]

And this, explained Wilde, was the reason why "all art is immoral." The most recurrently anguished cry of the artist was against the claim of society in the voice of the moralist, against the pressure of the Philistine practical environment.[2]

A moral theory of art, we may note in passing, is intrinsically a theory about a subject matter. As the moral critic John Ruskin put it:

> The picture which has the nobler and more numerous ideas, however awkwardly expressed, is a greater and a better picture

[7] *The Critic as Artist*, in *Intentions* (London, 1913), p. 145.
[8] Preface to *Dorian Gray*.
[9] *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (New York, 1890), p. 136.
[1] *The Critic as Artist*, in *Intentions* (London, 1913), p. 169.
[2] See, for instance, Whistler, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, p. 143: "Humanity takes the place of Art, and God's creations are excused for their usefulness."

> than that which has the less noble and less numerous ideas, however beautifully expressed. No weight, nor mass, nor beauty of execution can outweigh one grain or fragment of thought.[3]

But the rebuttal by art-for-art's-sake was in some measure only a reflection of the same choice, a capture of a risky gambit pawn, a too easy triumph over moralistic rigor by the introduction of a rival rigor.

> The only beautiful things . . . are the things that do not concern us. As long as a thing is useful or necessary to us, or affects us in any way, either for pain or for pleasure . . . it is outside the proper sphere of art. To art's subject-matter we should be more or less indifferent.[4]

The aestheticism of the 19th century had its own ideas about what is acceptable subject matter for art. This was roughly that complex of motifs at which we have already glanced in Poe and Baudelaire: the exotic and bizarre, the morbid and ugly, and the gilded and artificial.[5] And increasingly the dark area of this triad was acceptable only under an artifice of gilt. Art for art's sake—the art of the Yellow Book era—was an art of a "fiery-coloured world," [6] a world out of this world, out of the 19th-century socio-real and middle-class context. Beauty had "slim gilded feet." [7] This was one expression of the artist's isolation, the aristocratic exclusiveness of interest, the withdrawal into ivory-tower luxury, by which he was to earn so much contempt from socio-realist quarters.

At the same time, it is important to notice that such an exclusiveness was capable of a somewhat different emphasis. Wilde in the passage quoted above apparently means that there are some subject-matters which concern us, and some which do not, and the latter only are artistic. But a person could use nearly the same words and convey the different meaning that all subject matters, even those which concern us most acutely, should somehow be treated by the artist with detachment. "To art's subject-matter, we should be more or less indifferent." This would be a continuation and a degeneration of "negative capability," the anti-

[3] *Modern Painters*, Part I, Section I, Chapter 2. Ruskin differed from Arnold in that his interests were more confessedly practical and sociological. and again he differed from the French or Russian socio-realist critics in the direction of his thinking toward medievalism and the cultivation of a handicraft norm of values. But even more than Arnold, Ruskin stood in the public mind as a symbol of the moral critic. "The great arts," he said, ". . . have had, and can have, but three principal directions of purpose, first, that of enforcing the religion of men; secondly, that of perfecting their ethical state; thirdly, that of doing them material service" (*Lectures on Art*, New York, 1880, p. 37). Cf. Charles A. Yount, *The Reaction Against Ruskin in Art Criticism* (Chicago, 1941).

[4] Wilde, *The Decay of Lying*, in *Intentions*, pp. 16–17.

[5] Cf. William Gaunt, *The Aesthetic Adventure* (London, 1945), pp. 1–10.

[6] *The Critic as Artist*, in *Intentions*, p. 145.

[7] *The Critic as Artist*, in *Intentions*, p. 186.

partisan conception as entertained by Keats, the tolerance of "uncertainties, mysteries, doubts." "We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us." [8] Art for art's sake may be seen as a kind of aesthetico-scientific detachment, an intellectual reaction against the romantic letting down of the hair and flood of personal emotion. Poe's *Philosophy of Composition*, making a parade of rational deliberacy and professional efficiency with regard to the most melancholy and lovely emotion a human being can experience, that for the death of a beautiful woman, combined an extremely exclusive view of subject matter with an aesthetic remoteness that would become typical. Art for art's sake has been described with some insight as a kind of return to the *vita contemplativa*, the *Bios Theōrētikos*, of the Christian ages. Schopenhauer's early exposition of such a notion lay for a while in obscurity but became popular toward the end of the century.[9] This approach to asceticism, in the literary men and painters at least, was a close kin of 19th-century medievalism—with the difference between the Middle Ages and the 19th century that the latter, especially under the rubric of art for art's sake, offered less to contemplate.

V

In the later era of art for art's sake, the argument sometimes became an appeal to a supposedly pure aesthetic element of "form." "Form," said Wilde, "is everything. It is the secret of life." "Start with the worship of form, and there is no secret in art that will not be revealed to you." [1] The term "form" might now and then be somewhat mysterious, but for one thing it had a close relation with the idea of craftsmanship so far as the latter was conceived as a quality discoverable in the art work itself. This meant in one sense, a literal sense, the craftsmanship of verse technique. Thus Wilde waxed ecstatic over the powers of rhyme.

> Rhyme . . . in the hands of the real artist becomes not merely a material element of metrical beauty, but a spiritual element of thought and passion also. . . . rhyme . . . can turn man's utterance to the speech of gods; rhyme, the one chord we have added to the Greek lyre.[2]

The matter may be plentifully, if more trivially, illustrated in the practice of the English "Parnassian" poets and translators (the "Rondelier" set) Payne, Lang, Dobson, Henley, Gosse—who followed Théodore de

[8] John Keats, *Letters*, ed. M. B. Forman, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1935), pp. 72, 96: Nos. 32 and 44 (December 21, 1817, and February 3, 1818); cf. his advice to Shelley, p. 507: No. 227 (August 9, 1818).

[9] Gilbert and Kuhn, p. 472.

[1] *The Critic as Artist*, in *Intentions*, pp. 201–2.

[2] *The Critic as Artist*, in *Intentions*, pp. 102–3.

Banville in a devotion to French medieval and Renaissance poets (Villon, Charles d'Orléans, Marot, Ronsard) and the intricately fixed forms which they had perfected, *rondeau, ballade, villanelle, chant royal,* triolet.[3] "I intended an ode, And it turned to a sonnet."

But in another, and perhaps in the long run more significant, sense, the 19th-century pursuit of fine craftsmanship and "form" was working all along to establish a new kind of liaison, both literal and metaphoric, between poetry and the musical and visual arts.[4] The concept of poetry as "music" in the later 19th century arrived at a new subtlety, far refined beyond mimetic views of the 18th century, and in France this was a notable part of symbolist thinking.[5] The relation with visual art in the special mode of art for art's sake, going back perhaps to Hugo's *Les Orientales* (1829) and Gautier's *Emaux et Camées* (1853), was in a peculiar way more metaphoric and perhaps more fallacious. In a remark on his *Emaux et Camées* Gautier had written:

> This title . . . expresses the plan of treating tiny subjects in a severely formal way—like working on a gold or copper surface with brilliant enamels, or using a graver's wheel on precious stones, agate, cornelian, or onyx. Each piece would have to be as finely chased as an image for the cover of a jewel box or seal ring—something reminiscent of ancient medals such as painters and sculptors keep about their studios.[6]

In the same spirit Pater spoke of making language "a serious study, weighing the precise power of every phrase and word, as though it were precious metal."[7] *Améthystes, Rimes Dorées, Intaglios,* "Thoughts in Marble," *Proverbs in Porcelain, Ballades in Blue China* are characteristic of the period. They represent a passion for smooth surface and sharp outline, the poem as nearly as possible conceived as a thing, a hard shape, not a discourse. If this was an ideal difficult for literature to achieve, nevertheless the general aesthetic theory might look intently in that direction. Wilde praised purely decorative, or arabesque, art in virtue of its "deliberate rejection of Nature as the ideal of beauty, as well as of the imitative method of the ordinary painter."[8] During this era, visual art, reacting against the new claims of photography, tried to move closer to music, which was considered as a nearly pure form and hence an artistic ideal. The sufficient instance for the moment, if on the inten-

[3] See James K. Robinson, "A Neglected Phase of the Aesthetic Movement: English Parnassianism," *PMLA,* LXVIII (September, 1953), 733–54.

[4] Cf. *ante* Chapter 13.

[5] Cf. *post* Chapter 26, pp. 590–6.

[6] *Les Progrès de la Poésie Française depuis 1830,* in *Histoire du Romantisme,* 3d ed. (Paris, 1874), p. 322.

[7] *Marius the Epicurean,* Chapter VI (London, 1893), p. 71.

[8] *The Critic as Artist,* in *Intentions,* p. 200.

tionalist side, is Whistler's painting of his mother, bearing the title: "Arrangement in Grey and Black." [9]

The most flourishing descendant of art for art's sake during the early 20th century has been the school of pure "formalist" criticism in the graphic arts. Much more than any kind of literary criticism, this school has continued and accentuated the aesthetic trend not only toward purity of form but toward exclusiveness of appeal. "In proportion as art becomes purer," says Roger Fry, "the number of people to whom it appeals gets less. . . . It appeals only to the aesthetic sensibility, and that in most men is comparatively weak." [1] "The representative element in a work of art," says Clive Bell in his classic treatise entitled *Art*, "may or may not be harmful; always it is irrelevant." [2] And he tells us much of a "peculiar emotion provoked by works of art," "the aesthetic emotion," the correlative of which is something called "significant form."

> What quality is shared by all objects that provoke our aesthetic emotions? What quality is common to Sta. Sophia and the windows at Chartres, Mexican sculpture, a Persian bowl, Chinese carpets, Giotto's frescoes at Padua, and the masterpieces of Poussin, Piero della Francesca, and Cézanne? Only one answer seems possible—significant form. In each, lines and colours combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms, stir our aesthetic emotions.[3]

The theory, despite a more overt tendency to tautology than is apparent in most art theories, might be a good enough theory if it could be compelled to answer the question whether lines and colors ever have their complete "significance" in a state purged entirely of our concrete optical experience—the resemblance of a circle to the sun and the moon and the wheel, the contrast between the geometrically ruled straight line and the whole world of organic nature. The problem, as we have suggested, may not have a very precise counterpart in literature,[4] yet it may offer some instruction, *a fortiori*, to literary theory. What is not quite possible in lines and colors may be even less possible in words. Again, the difference between aesthetic formalism and any ideas which the historian of metaphysics may be willing to impute to Kant will not quite eliminate the fact that this formalism (a theory of non-empirical, geometric art

[9] See Gaunt, *The Aesthetic Adventure*, p. 82, on Whistler's *Nocturnes*. Wilde said that "music is the perfect type of art" because it "can never reveal its ultimate secret" (*Intentions*, p. 148); and Pater: "All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music" (*The School of Giorgione*, in *The Renaissance*, Modern Library edition, p. 111).

[1] *Vision and Design* (London, 1920), p. 10.

[2] *Art* (New York, c. 1914), p. 25.

[3] *Art* (New York, c. 1914), p. 8.

[4] Twentieth-century Italian and French versions of "pure poetry" (syllables without sense) and Russian experiments in "trans-sense" language provide parallels.

values) stands in a fairly direct, if blurred line of descent from the Kantian *a priorism.*[5]

VI

In the didactic theories of the 19th century, art, even though it took a creative leadership, had to be somehow true to the way things basically are. In Arnold's formula—art is a "criticism of life"—the criticism would obviously have to be somehow faithful to, or limited by, its object. But art for art's sake, both early and late, wanted very much to say something nearly the opposite. Thus Whistler, in terms sufficiently reminiscent of Baudelaire:

> That Nature is always right is an assertion artistically as untrue as it is one whose truth is universally taken for granted. Nature is very rarely right, to such an extent even, that it might almost be said that Nature is usually wrong: that is to say, the condition of things that shall bring about the perfection of harmony worthy of a picture is rare.[6]

The mythopoeia of Schelling and Friedrich Schlegel and the Arnoldian neo-humanism, as well as some forms of the socio-realistic claim, were instances of a lofty view of the artist's power of reshaping reality. The morally didactic principle, the recognition of the artist's undoubted power over the wills and hearts of men, shaded off subtly into idealistic concepts of creative imagination or creative will. All along, too, the notion of art as creator was susceptible of receiving a more purely aesthetic, a more playful, twist. A French historian of romanticism and its effects on real life points out that the 19th century was filled with sins copied from the poets and novelists. For example, a plague of suicides that swept France during several decades of the mid-century followed a pattern of feeling set in romances like *Werther* and *René* and in the morbid verse and prose of writers like Petrus Borel, Philothée O'Neddy, and Alphonse Rabbe.[7] Heine in his *Florentine Nights*, 1836, shows how far the argument might sometimes facetiously venture when he maintains that the beauty of the Italian women is a clear instance of the influence of the fine arts on human physique. There may have been

[5] Formalist art critics frequently make an appeal to the mathematical elements in Plato's theory. Cf. *ante*, Chapter 1, p. 17.

[6] *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, p. 143.

[7] Louis Maigron, *Le Romantisme et les Moeurs* (Paris, 1910), Chapter II, "*Le Romantisme et le Suicide*," esp. pp. 314–15, 324, 332–3, 337, 347. "*En voici un, par exemple, Marcel V***, qui se vante d'avoir 'tout goûté, tout épuisé' de la vie conformément aux meilleurs principes romantiques. . . . Il relit* Obermann, René, Joseph Delorme; *et avant de se tuer, juge original de chanter un 'hymne à la Mort'* (p. 324). "*Je lègue à notre cher Club la petite bibliothèque de vous bien connue. A vous particulièrement j'ai réservé* Werther, René, Obermann, les Oeuvres *de Rabbe, et* Jacques. . . . *C'étaient mes bréviaires*" (p. 347).

a time when nature supplied models for art, but now it is the other way round. "A feeling for the beautiful has penetrated the whole people." "Spirit works on flesh." [8] More moderately, the theorist might observe that art teaches us what to see in nature, that it is characteristic of the human being, as Goncourt put it, "to see nothing in nature that is not a remembrance and recollection of art." [9]

The twin notions which we have just been sketching—that nature is inferior to art (so that art is forced to be untrue) and that art has power to anticipate and modify nature—are developed with fine paradoxical abandon by Wilde in his dialogue *The Decay of Lying* (1889). As to the matter of art and truth:

> My own experience is that the more we study Art, the less we care for Nature. What Art really reveals to us is Nature's lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony, her absolutely unfinished condition. Nature has good intentions, of course, but, as Aristotle once said, she cannot carry them out.[1]
>
> If something cannot be done to check, or at least to modify, our monstrous worship of facts, Art will become sterile, and beauty will pass away from the land.
>
> Even Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson, that delightful master of delicate and fanciful prose, is tainted with this modern vice, for we know positively no other name for it. There is such a thing as robbing a story of its reality by trying to make it too true, and *The Black Arrow* is so inartistic as not to contain a single anachronism to boast of, while the transformation of Dr. Jekyll reads dangerously like an experiment out of the *Lancet*.[2]
>
> Wordsworth went to the lakes, but he was never a lake poet. He found in stones the sermons he had already hidden there. He went moralising about the district, but his good work was produced when he returned, not to Nature but to poetry. Poetry gave him "Laodamia," and the fine sonnets, and the great Ode, such as it is. Nature gave him "Martha Ray" and "Peter Bell," and the address to Mr. Wilkinson's spade.[3]

. . .

[8] *Florentinische Nächte* (Vienna, 1945, Amandus-Edition), pp. 19–20, "*Erste Nacht.*" "*Die Natur hat hier den Künstlern das Kapital zurückgenommen, das sie ihnen einst geliehen, und siehe! es hat sich aufs entzückendste verzinst. Die Natur, welche einst den Künstlern ihre Modelle lieferte, sie kopiert heute ihrerseits die Meisterwerke, die dadurch entstanden. Der Sinn für das Schöne hat das ganze Volk durchdrungen, und wie einst das Fleisch auf den Geist, so wirkt jetzt der Geist auf das Fleisch.*"

[9] Albert Cassagne, *La Théorie de l'Art pour l'Art en France* (Paris, 1906), p. 325.

[1] *Intentions* (London, 1913), p. 1.

[2] *Intentions*, pp. 8–9.

[3] *Intentions*, p. 19. A critique of Shakespeare introduced by Wilde (p. 21) makes a startling comparison to that which we have quoted from Tolstoy in our last chap-

> As a method Realism is a complete failure, and the two things that every artist should avoid are modernity of form and modernity of subject-matter. To us, who live in the nineteenth century, any century is a suitable subject for art except our own. . . . it is only the modern that ever becomes old-fashioned. M. Zola sits down to give us a picture of the Second Empire. Who cares for the Second Empire now? [4]

> They will call upon Shakespeare—they always do—and will quote that hackneyed passage forgetting that this unfortunate aphorism about Art holding the mirror up to Nature, is deliberately said by Hamlet in order to convince the bystanders of his absolute insanity in all art-matters.[5]

And secondly, the matter of art's priority to nature.

> Where, if not from the Impressionists, do we get those wonderful brown fogs that come creeping down on our streets, blurring the gaslamps and changing the houses into monstrous shadows? To whom, if not to them and their master, do we owe the lovely silver mists that brood over our river, and turn to faint forms of fading grace curved bridge and swaying barge. The extraordinary change that has taken place in the climate of London during the last ten years is entirely due to a particular school of Art. You smile. Consider the matter from a scientific or a metaphysical point of view, and you will find that I am right. For what is Nature? Nature is no great mother who has borne us. She is our creation. It is in our brain that she quickens to life. Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the Arts that have influenced us. To look at a thing is very different from seeing a thing. One does not see anything until one sees its beauty. Then, and then only, does it come into existence. At present, people see fogs, not because there are fogs, but because poets and painters have taught them the mysterious loveliness of such effects. There may have been fogs for centuries in London. I dare say there were. But no one saw them, and so we do not know anything about them. They did not exist till Art had invented them.[6]

And if so much was true of art itself, what of art criticism? The notion of an art criticism for its own sake—of a criticism that was itself a kind of artistic exercise—was strongly invited. "Impressionistic" crit-

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ter. From the viewpoint of art for art's sake one of Shakespeare's faults is "the over-importance assigned to character" in his later plays, his uncouthness and vulgarity, his "realism."

[4] *Intentions*, pp. 52–3.

[5] *Intentions*, p. 28.

[6] *Intentions*, p. 39.

icism of considerable brilliance had begun to appear in English at least as early as the work of Lamb and Hazlitt—Hazlitt's "gusto" and his *bravura* appreciation of *Elizabethan Literature* or *English Comic Writers*, Lamb's baroque whimsicalities concerning Shakespeare's tragedies or English "Artificial Comedy." We encounter there a use of metaphor, an overt personal reference, and a Longinian evocation of feeling such as cannot be matched in earlier English criticism. In a note on the *Revenger's Tragedy* Lamb confessed: "I never read it but my ears tingle, and I feel a hot blush overspread my cheeks." [7] And Hazlitt: "I say what I think: I think what I feel. I cannot help receiving certain impressions from things; and I have sufficient courage to declare (somewhat abruptly) what they are." [8] Later on Sainte-Beuve would say that for him criticism was only a way of "exhaling a hidden poetry in an indirect way." "Criticism as I intend it and want to practise it, is invention and perpetual creation." [9] The heyday of this kind of profession was not reached, however, until the end of the 19th century and the first three decades of the 20th, with critics like Anatole France and Jules Lemaître in France, Saintsbury and Quiller-Couch in England, and their cosmopolite disciples in America, Huneker, Mencken, Nathan, or Van Vechten—souls adventuring among masterpieces. The candor of Anatole France is perhaps best known. "To be quite frank, the critic ought to say: 'Gentlemen, I am going to speak about myself apropos of Shakespeare, apropos of Racine.'" [1]

At least three distinguishable propositions seem to be present in the philosophy of impressionist criticism and to call for notice if our account is to be accurate.

(1) That the most necessary, or the only necessary, equipment of the critic is his sensibility. The classic statement is that of Pater in the Preface to his Renaissance *Studies.*

> What is important . . . is not that the critic should possess a correct abstract definition of beauty for the intellect, but a certain kind of temperament, the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects.[2]

[7] *Characters of Dramatic Writers Contemporary with Shakespeare,* 1808, in Charles and Mary Lamb, *Works,* ed. E. V. Lucas, I (London, 1903), 48.

[8] *Works,* ed. P. P. Howe, V (London, 1930), 175.

[9] *Portraits de Femmes* (1870), p. 411; *Portraits Littéraires* (1862–64), III, 546; from a manuscript chapter by René Wellek.

[1] *On Life and Letters, First Series,* trans. A. W. Evans (London, 1911), Preface, p. viii.

[2] See the comparable celebration of the "critic's sensorium," his "intimate personal relation" to the piece of literature, his "prizing" of "the fleeting mood, the passing poignant moment of enjoyment," his refusal "to feel twice alike about the same poem," by the Harvard Professor Lewis E. Gates, in his essay "Impression and Appreciation," in *Studies and Appreciation* (New York, 1900), pp. 208–9; cf. Zabel, p. 21.

"Temperament," said Wilde, "is the primary requisite for the critic—a temperament exquisitely susceptible to beauty." [3]

(2) That, as the artist himself is the person most susceptible to impressions of beauty, the artist himself is the only licensed critic. In his suit against Ruskin, Whistler complained:

> It is not only when criticism is inimical that I object to it, but also when it is incompetent. I hold that none but an artist can be a competent critic.[4]

(This idea comes echoing down even to our own time, in the opinion, for instance, of Mr. Eliot, who has been rebutted by Mr. C. S. Lewis with the observation that the poet by this argument crowns himself "King of Pointland," for he can trust the judgment of those who acknowledge him a poet only in virtue of being a poet in order to judge them. It is true, notes Mr. Lewis, that good reasoning can be recognized only by a good reasoner; yet it is not true that good cooking can be recognized only by a good cook.[5] Poetry would appear to be a type of product—in part like reasoning, in part like cooking—which offers at least a considerable resistance to the theory that only a poet can be a critic.) [6]

(3) That a good critic, in virtue of his very criticism, is a true artist, or the truest artist. This is the extreme impressionistic theory of criticism. It is a theory of autotelic criticism, of criticism for its own sake, and perhaps it is a logical enough outcome of the original paradox of art for art's sake. The thesis was perhaps first distinctly propounded by Friedrich Schlegel.[7] It is developed by Wilde in a companion piece to *The Decay of Lying*, a long dialogue essay entitled *The Critic as Artist.*

> GILBERT: Yes: it has been said by one whose gracious memory we all revere, and the music of whose pipe once lured Proserpina from her Sicilian fields, and made those white feet stir, and not in vain, the Cumnor cowslips, that the proper aim of Criticism is to see the object as in itself it really is. But this is a very serious error, and takes no cognisance of Criticism's most perfect form, which is in its essence purely subjective, and seeks to reveal its own secret and not the secret of another. For the highest Criticism deals with art not as expressive but as impressive purely.

[3] *The Critic as Artist*, in *Intentions*, p. 194.
[4] *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (New York, 1890), p. 6.
[5] Cf. *ante* Chapter 5, p. 84. The relevance of such observations is of course perennial.
[6] C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (London, 1942), pp. 9–10.
[7] Cf. *ante* Chapter 17, p. 376.

ERNEST: But is that really so?

GILBERT: Of course it is. Who cares whether Mr. Ruskin's views on Turner are sound or not? What does it matter? That mighty and majestic prose of his, so fervid and so fiery-coloured in its noble eloquence, so rich in its elaborate symphonic music, so sure and certain, at its best, in subtle choice of word and epithet, is at least as great a work of art as any of those wonderful sunsets that bleach or rot on their corrupted canvases in England's gallery.[8]

Hours ago, Ernest, you asked me the use of Criticism. You might just as well have asked me the use of thought. It is Criticism, as Arnold points out, that creates the intellectual atmosphere of the age. It is Criticism, as I hope to point out myself some day, that makes the mind a fine instrument. . . . Considered as an instrument of thought, the English mind is coarse and undeveloped. The only thing that can purify it is the growth of the critical instinct.[9]

This passage closes the cycle of aesthetico-impressionist thought in the appropriate way, showing how in the boundless realm of idealism aesthetic and didactic theory become one, or how impressionistic criticism can be assimilated to didactic art. If nature, reversing our usual conceptions, is to imitate art, then art, continuing the direction of reference, may well imitate criticism. Or one art, that which calls itself Art, will imitate, or at least be greatly influenced by, another art, that which calls itself criticism. This will be easier if criticism in turn calls itself Art. Thus Wilde and Arnold find themselves at one. Wilde and Arnold, the aesthete and the austere moralist, were both descendants of Schelling and Friedrich Schlegel. They were Victorian brothers. Both entertained not only a low opinion of the English mind but a vision of art and art criticism as free activities which were destined to bring about man's salvation from the bondage of philosophy and religion.

SUPPLEMENT

The theological consideration of the working idea clearly shows how foreign to art is the servile imitation of the appearance of nature, for art's most fundamental demand is that the work make apparent not something else already made, but the spirit from which it proceeds. As God makes created participa-

[8] *Intentions*, p. 140–1.
[9] *Intentions*, pp. 209–10.

tions of His being exist outside Himself, so the artist puts himself—not what he sees, but what he is—into what he makes. So anyone contemplating the myriad landscapes bearing God's signature at every revolution of light, or the features of any beast or man whatever, clearly sees that they are literally *inimitable* and that there is more humility in continuing in our own way the creative impulse than in striving to obtain a like effect in a picture.

The truth is, and it is the core of the mystery, that we have nothing but what we have received.

There is considerable truth in Wilde's paradoxes on lying; truth which, needless to say, has nothing to do with the shoddy Hegelianism with which he tricks it out. It is quite true that things are better in the mind than in themselves, that they acquire their full stature only when they have been expressed, and that they themselves pray to be assumed into the heaven of metaphysical or poetical thought, where they proceed to live outside time with a life which is universal. What would have become of the Trojan War without Homer? Unfortunate are the adventures which are never narrated.

But what Wilde, choked by the paper roses of his aestheticism, failed to understand is that our art does not derive from itself alone what it imparts to things; it spreads over them a secret which it first discovered in them, in their invisible substance or in their endless exchanges and correspondences. Take it out of "that blessed reality given once for all, in the centre of which we are situated," and it ceases to be. It transforms, removes, brings closer together, transfigures; it does not create. It is by the way in which he changes the shape of the universe passing through his mind, in order to make a form apprehended in things shine upon a matter, that the artist impresses his signature upon his work. He recomposes for each, *according as the poetry in him changes him*, a world more real than the reality offered to the senses.

So, because it is subjected in the mind of a man, the law of imitation, of resemblance, remains constant for our art, but in a sense purified. It must transpose the secret rules of being in the manner of producing the work, and it must be as faithful and exact, in transforming reality according to the laws governing the work to be done, as science in conforming thereto. What it makes must resemble not the material appearance of things, but some one of the hidden significances whose iris God alone sees glittering on the neck of His creatures—and for that very reason it will also resemble the created mind which in its own way discerned those invisible colours. Resemblance, but a *spiritual* resemblance. Realism, if you like, but transcendental realism.

—Jacques Maritain, "The Frontiers of Poetry," in *Art and Scholasticism*, trans. J. F. Scanlan (New York, 1942), pp. 95–6, quoted by permission of Charles Scribner's Sons

When poetry loses sight of the wonderful, it loses its significance and justification. Poetry cannot thrive in our trivial and commonplace world. The miraculous, the marvelous, and the mysterious are the only subjects that admit of a truly poetic treatment.

This conception of poetry is, however, rather a qualification and limitation than a genuine account of the creative process of art. Curiously enough the great realists of the nineteenth century had in this respect a keener insight

into the art process than their romantic adversaries. They maintained a radical and uncompromising naturalism. But it was precisely this naturalism which led them to a more profound conception of artistic form. Denying the "pure forms" of the idealistic schools they concentrated upon the material aspect of things. By virtue of this sheer concentration they were able to overcome the conventional dualism between the poetic and the prosaic spheres. The nature of a work of art, according to the realists, does not depend on the greatness or smallness of its subject matter. No subject whatever is impermeable to the formative energy of art. One of the greatest triumphs of art is to make us see commonplace things in their real shape and in their true light. Balzac plunged into the most trifling features of the "human comedy." Flaubert made profound analyses of the meanest characters. In some of Émile Zola's novels we discover minute descriptions of the structure of a locomotive, of a department store, or of a coal mine. No technical detail, however insignificant, was omitted from these accounts. Nevertheless, running through the works of all these realists great imaginative power is observable, which is by no means inferior to that of the romantic writers. The fact that this power could not be openly acknowledged was a serious drawback to the naturalistic theories of art. In their attempts to refute the romantic conceptions of a transcendental poetry they reverted to the old definition of art as an imitation of nature. In so doing they missed the principal point, since they failed to recognize the symbolic character of art. If such a characterization of art were admitted, there seemed to be no escape from the metaphysical theories of romanticism. Art is, indeed, symbolism, but the symbolism of art must be understood in an immanent, not in a transcendent sense. Beauty is "The Infinite finitely presented" according to Schelling. The real subject of art is not, however, the metaphysical Infinite of Schelling, nor is it the Absolute of Hegel. It is to be sought in certain fundamental structural elements of our sense experience itself—in lines, design, in architectural, musical forms. These elements are, so to speak, omnipresent. Free of all mystery, they are patent and unconcealed; they are visible, audible, tangible. In this sense Goethe did not hesitate to say that art does not pretend to show the metaphysical depth of things, it merely sticks to the surface of natural phenomena. But this surface is not immediately given. We do not know it before we discover it in the works of the great artists. This discovery, however, is not confined to a special field. To the extent that human language can express everything, the lowest and the highest things, art can embrace and pervade the whole sphere of human experience. Nothing in the physical or moral world, no natural thing and no human action, is by its nature and essence excluded from the realm of art, because nothing resists its formative and creative process. "Quicquid essentia dignum est," says Bacon in his *Novum Organum* (Book I, Aphorism CXX), "id etiam scientia dignum est." This dictum holds for art as well as for science.

—Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man* (New Haven, 1944), pp. 156–8, by permission of the Yale University Press

CHAPTER 23

EXPRESSIONISM: BENEDETTO CROCE

§ *nineteenth-century expressionism, context and origin of Croce's idealism, his* Aesthetic, *neo-idealism,* Autobiography—*II. the four activities of spirit, intuition-expression the aesthetic fact, externalization—III. resemblance of Croce to Plotinus, double concept of form and art, ugliness as failure of intuition, simple successful intuition vs. rich or full intuition, the analogy of bronze-casting—IV. duplicity in Croce's basic treatment of the affective, "feeling" in art, "lyrism" in his later theory (the* Britannica *article, the* Essence of Aesthetic)—*V. negative grounds of the system: rejection of the figures, genres, rules, analysis, etc., rejection of specific value terms—VI. Croce as a practical critic,* The Defence of Poetry, *"Poetic Personality" of the author* (Shakespeare, Ariosto, and Corneille), *Croce's anthological reading, neglect of plot and character, resemblance to Longinus—VII. balance sheet for and against the system, Croce's strength and influence* §

A RECENT STUDY ENTITLED *The Mirror and the Lamp*[1] SEES ONE OF the main trends of romantic poetics to have been a turning from Renaissance concepts of art as mechanically effected mimesis toward a new concept of art as organic creation. The mirror gave back the literal image of reality external to itself. The lamp threw out its own discovering and organizing rays into the void of darkness. A somewhat earlier study of the English romantic theory of poetry[2] had attempted to show that the concept of creative imagination entertained by Coleridge, Shelley and other poets was the same as the "aesthetic" concept

[1] M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and The Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York, 1953).

[2] A. E. Powell, *The Romantic Theory of Poetry* (London, 1926).

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elaborated a century later by Benedetto Croce.[3] The present writers, in undertaking some account of the Crocean aesthetic and in placing it at this juncture in their story, believe that Croce does actually achieve something like an ultimate definition and synthesis of the expressionistic art theory which first came clearly into view with the Germans and Coleridge and which was tested and matured through such 19th-century vicissitudes as in part we have been describing. Croce's aesthetic is a long way from looking like the preciously burnished perversions of a Baudelaire, the Whistlerian study in gray and black, the velvet-coated flippancies of a Wilde. Yet the theory is precisely an "aesthetic," a master theory of art for art's sake, a profound realization of all that might underlie and in part justify the 19th-century cry that art must be pure.

Croce's theory grows out of an initial preoccupation with the historico-social thinking which we have seen to be intrinsic to one sort of 19th-century didactic theory, and it is a partial resolution of the conflict between such theory and the starker versions of art for art's sake. His early studies, centering in the antiquities of Italy and especially of his native Naples, resulted soon in a conviction that the simple accumulation of factual knowledge was futile. He read Vico's *Scienza Nuova.* And there came a time in March, 1893, when "after a whole day of intense thought," he produced an essay entitled "History subsumed under the general concept of art." Shortly afterwards he complemented his historical studies by a period of concentration on economics and a studied rejection of Marxism.[4] In February and May of 1900 he read before the Accademia Pontaniana of Naples a memoir entitled *Fundamental Theses of an Aesthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistic,* and this, with some amplifications, and the addition of a historical section, became his epoch-making *Aesthetic,* published in 1902. In later years Croce has stressed[5] the importance of his *Essence of Aesthetic* (or *Breviario*), a lecture written for the opening of the Rice Institute in 1912, and his *Encyclopedia Britannica* article "Aesthetic," by which he captured the term "aesthetic" in the English-speaking world for his own concept and system. We shall not overlook these statements. Yet the earlier *Aesthetic* not only opens up the system (and Croce's objections to all other systems) in far more detail but reveals in like detail some of the consequences of the system for literary study. This work joins with Croce's *Logic* and his *Philosophy of the Practical, Economic and Ethic* to compose his *Philosophy of the Spirit.* In his "opinion" this "exhausts the entire field of philosophy."[6]

[3] Croce in his *Conversazioni critiche,* Third Series (Bari, 1932), pp. 7–13, has some doubts about Miss Powell's understanding of his philosophy.

[4] *An Autobiography,* trans. R. G. Collingwood (Oxford, 1927), pp. 56–60.

[5] E. F. Carritt, *Philosophies of Beauty* (Oxford, 1931), p. 223, n. 1.

[6] Croce, *Aesthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistic,* trans. Douglas Ainslie, 2nd ed. (New York, 1922–29), p. xxix, Croce's Preface of 1907. Croce's

In the Hegelian idealism there was something, a world or nature, on which spirit worked in a dialectical process. Marxism reduced this to a very thoroughly monistic working of material nature in and through itself. Croce, using as his entrance into the metaphysical realm no other than a literary observation, concerning the breakdown of classical rules and genres of art, arrives at an opposite, but equally thoroughgoing, monism of spirit. His criticism of the classical genres, he tells us in his *Autobiography*, enabled him to lay his finger "on the point at which 'nature,' the product of man's own spirit, is introduced into the pure spiritual world of art." Having "thus denied the reality of nature in art," he was led by degrees "to deny it everywhere and to discover everywhere its true character, not as reality but as the product of abstracting thought." [7] "Spirit" in the Crocean philosophy is the "absolute reality." Spirit "generates the contents of experience." [8] Some of these contents of experience, it is true, assume the character (by abstraction) of something external to the knowing spirit and (as we shall see) even become the means by which further acts of spirit are projected and made known to individual spiritual agents external to each other and to the immediate consciousness which we must suppose to be spirit for the philosopher of the system. But it is perhaps easiest just to say that Crocean neo-idealism is not interested in such embarrassments to its sweep. They are looked on as problems arising out of abstraction and hence ulterior to the concretely rich, vital and real intuitive knowledge which is the direct creation of spirit.

II

THERE are only four basic, essentially different activities or "moments" of spirit, four kinds of reality: two theoretical, or knowing activities; two practical, or volitional. They occur in the following order, each one supposing or needing all those that precede it: 1. intuition-expression (the primary imaginative act of individual characterization or forming); 2. conceptualization (the intellective and scientific knowledge of relations between individual intuitions); 3. volition in general (economic activity); and 4. volition of the rationally and universally conceived end—willing the true self of spirit (ethical activity—absolute freedom). These four ultimates, qualitatively and a-prioristically different from one another, take the place of such classical ultimates as the ideas of Plato, the sub-

Aesthetic is quoted throughout the present chapter from the translation of Ainslie by permission of the copyright holder, Mrs. G. C. Quinton. Ainslie's widely influential translation first appeared in 1909. It was republished in 1953 by The Vision Press, Peter Owen, London.

[7] *An Autobiography*, trans. R. G. Collingwood (Oxford, 1927) p. 94.

[8] J. A. Smith, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th edition, VI, 732, "Benedetto Croce."

stantial forms of Aristotle, the categories and ideas of Kant. Only these four have abstract, absolute, conceptual, dialectical validity (Ch. IX, p. 73).[9] All other concepts are distinguished only quantitatively, temporarily, conveniently, and more or less arbitrarily, in the boundless realm of our empirical experience. "What is true in the natural sciences is either philosophy or historic fact" (Ch. III). The four sciences corresponding to the four cardinal activities of spirit are: aesthetic, logic, economics, and ethics.

The aesthetician, then, focuses on the first of the spiritual activities, intuition-expression. This is bounded at two levels, above by the abstracted concept, below by an "obscure region of the soul" (Ch. 1, p. 9), unconscious or subconscious, something which Croce most often calls "impression," "sensation," or "matter." It is less a thing that really exists than a "notion postulated as a mere limit" (Ch. I, p. 6). It is not spiritual activity, but inchoate passivity, a formless nothing, a mere urge of something to be known, to be achieved, to be born.[1] Intuition-expression is individual character, it is form—always different in content, but always form. "The aesthetic fact, therefore, is form, and nothing but form" (Ch. II, p. 16). The system banishes all notion of art as illusion or as mechanical reproduction of, or substitute for, external beauty (Ch. II). It asserts that the notion of external physical beauty (either natural or artistic) is a "verbal paradox" (Ch. XIII). The natural world, be it remembered, exists only at the conceptual and abstract level.

It is of first importance to the system to insist that intuition-expression is *both* intuition *and* "expression," that no intuition can occur without expression. Knowing a thing is simply expressing it to oneself. There are really no mute inglorious Miltons, no geometricians who cannot draw a figure on the blackboard (Ch. I, p. 9). Let us ask ourselves: Do I know anything which I cannot put in words, draw, carve, hum as a tune, or express by some other sign? Try to tell someone what that something is? Try to draw a picture of it. The embarrassments are obvious. If I know anything which I cannot express, at least I cannot communicate it to anyone else or prove its existence to anyone else.

But this admission would scarcely be enough for Croce. He puts the acts of speaking or singing, of drawing or painting, under the aesthetically non-essential head of "externalization"—a merely practical, or willed, activity which may or may not follow on the internal and involuntary activity of intuition-expression. The physical work of art, the statue, painting, or verbal sound, is an external stimulus which for the qualified recipient will produce the same intuition-expression (aesthetic

[9] *Aesthetic*, trans. Douglas Ainslie, 1929.

[1] Though at moments Croce is able to speak of it as actually something. "Everyone speaks and should speak according to the echoes which things arouse in his soul, that is, according to his impressions" (Ch. XVIII, p. 150).

experience) as prompted the artist to externalize. "Artistic technique" is no more than a complex of prior knowledge at the service of the artist in his volitional activity of externalizing (Ch. XV). "Expression" itself does not possess means.[2]

But looking inside ourselves again and reversing the direction of inquiry, let us ask: Could I have a poem in my head without writing it on paper or saying it aloud? Unless we are behaviorists enough to insist that the essential thing in silent thinking is some unobserved twitching of the throat muscles as the counterpart of audible speech, we will say we could. But could I have a painting in my head without going through the experimental act of smearing paint on canvas with a brush. Could I really? Answers will differ. Beyond doubt, some painters will say yes. Nevertheless, we would ordinarily think of a poem in the head, though not written down, as a bird in the hand; but of a painting in the head, though not painted, as a bird in the bush. Croce's insistence that there is no difference between the two cases (that *aesthetic* is identical with *linguistic*, Ch. XVIII) lies close to the heart of his secret, his strength, and his weakness.

In favor of Croce's view we may reflect, provisionally, that not only is it impossible to communicate to anyone else what we cannot put in signs of some sort, but that whatever we know of that kind (and most of us would surely claim to know something, even much, of that kind) is, by the very fact that we cannot manage it in signs, likely to be somewhat vague, ill-formed, and unavailable even for our own thinking. Signs do seem to help knowledge a great deal.

III

A FEATURE of Croce's system which has provoked some complaint from his critics is his strong tendency to assert the equivalence of terms that are ordinarily thought of as separate. "The entire aesthetic system of Croce," says one of his Italian critics, "amounts to merely a hunt for pseudonyms of the word 'art,' and may indeed be stated briefly and accurately in this formula: art=intuition=expression=imagination=fancy=beauty. And you must be careful not to take these words with the shadings and distinctions which they have in ordinary or scientific

[2] So far as it has aesthetic relevance, what is sometimes loosely called a new technique (a new kind of romance, a new style of light and shade in painting) is really a new work of art. The technique is part of the vision. Yet perhaps Croce slips for a moment when (Ch. XV, p. 112) he admits that certain theatrical methods (the use of women on the stage, the use of machinery for changing scenes rapidly) are in some more proper sense to be called "techniques." Rosalind as Katharine Hepburn is presumably a different aesthetic experience from Rosalind as boy actor.

language. Not a bit of it. Every word is merely a different series of syllables signifying absolutely and completely the same thing." [8] A counterpart of this sweeping principle of identity might be described as a subtly persistent principle of ambivalence. In this respect Croce's aesthetic is not unlike the few other most radical or metaphysical theories of both beauty and art which one encounters in ancient and modern times—and it is notably like the neo-Platonic identification of beauty with form, the principle of being, and the corollary Thomistic analogical transcendence of beauty. In such systems, what one might attempt to take as a special philosophy of art turns out to be a philosophy of all being, or of all knowledge. The circle defined is expanded to take in the whole horizon. The Plotinian form enjoyed by a piece of stone is beautiful in itself, but the example of an image exquisitely carved on the stone is used to give focus to the very idea of form. And the Crocean neo-idealism, despite a certain contempt for the mystical ad-libbing of Plotinus, is very much like the Plotinian idealism massively inverted; the *nous* "yonder" becomes the *nous* within, and all else is accordingly seen upside down. The Crocean concept of intuition-expression as the fundamental act both of all knowing and of the special kind of knowing called art involves a doubling almost identical with that of the two forms of stone in Plotinus. The difference between "history" and "art" in the Crocean system is the difference between fact and possibility. But within the general area of "art" itself a further distinction is demanded—a distinction between what is merely art in the sense of being not history and what is art in the sense of what is "generally called *par excellence* art." This is the difference between the art of a scribble on the blackboard or an everyday love letter, and on the other hand, the Art of the great masterpieces. And this difference is said to be merely quantitative and empirical; it is something to which philosophy is indifferent. Even the prose of a scientific discourse has its own character as an expressive effort, its own form. Ill-written=ill-thought (p. 24. Ch. III) is a Crocean equation of the most inclusive import.

> The artistic intuition differs from the ordinary not in intensity. The difference is not intensive but extensive.—p. 13

> The intuition of the simplest popular love-song, which says the same thing, or very nearly, as any declaration of love that issues at every moment from the lips of thousands of ordinary men, may be intensively perfect in its poor simplicity, although it be

[8] Giovanni Papini, *Four and Twenty Minds*, quoted by I. A. Richards, in *Principles of Literary Criticism* (New York, 1934), p. 255. We omit from Papini's equation two terms, "feeling" and "lyricism," because we have yet to note their place in Croce's thought.

> extensively so much more limited than the complex intuition of a love-song by Leopardi.—Ch. II, p. 13
>
> The whole difference, then, is quantitative, and as such is indifferent to philosophy, *scientia qualitatum*.—p. 13
>
> The limits of the expression-intuitions that are called art, as opposed to those that are vulgarly called non-art, are empirical and impossible to define. If an epigram be art, why not a simple word? If a story, why not the news jottings of the journalist? —p. 13

Why not indeed on Croce's major premises? What it all comes to is that the "aesthetic" of Croce is after all not a philosophy of Art, but a philosophy of all intuitive knowing. Still the fact seems to be never clearly admitted or even faced by Croce; it can be detected only by resolute comparison of phrases obviously not meant to be compared. The steady trend and rhetorical aim of Croce's *Aesthetic* is to suggest that the spiritual act of intuition-expression, as first broadly defined, is in fact the central and necessary conception for a theory of Art.

The notion of fullness, completeness, success in the achievement of intuition-expression plays an important role in the system. The "probable" in art is the same as the coherent. We strive with our intuitive power to master the confusion of passive sensation, the welter of brute impression, to objectify it and form it in the clear knowledge of spiritual dominion. When we succeed completely, and only then, beauty appears. Beauty is thus absolute, formal, unified, perfect. And it follows that the anti-aesthetic fact is simply lack of intuitional form. Ugliness in art is a hole in coherence.[4] Ugliness is embarrassment of intuitive activity; it is multiplicity, failure of knowledge and reality.[5]

But a certain amount of sliding in the use of terms would appear to

[4] As art does not imitate any beauty already existing in the external world, neither does it imitate, nor can it be spoiled by dealing with, what would ordinarily be called ugliness in the external world. The strong tendency of 20th-century art in all media to include or even to center on what is ordinarily called both evil and ugly in the external world is one correlative of the widely prevalent expressionist aesthetic. Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson* gives place in the annual exhibition of 1950 to Hyman Bloom's *Female Corpse, Back View* (*Art News*, XLIX, May, 1950, 17). This continues the classical and Renaissance opinion that even a dunghill if accurately represented is pleasing and the more modern debate of literary philosophers, like Lessing (*Laocoon*, Chs. XXIII–XXV) or in the 19th century the Hegelian Karl Rosenkranz (*Ästhetik des Hässlichen*, 1853) on the aesthetic relevance of the ugly.

[5] "If the ugly were *complete*, that is to say, without any element of beauty, it would for that very reason cease to be ugly, because it would be without the contradiction in which is the reason of its existence. The disvalue would become nonvalue." Unsuccessful art works are said to have "merits," but not beauty. These "merits" are beautiful parts, or beautiful small wholes, in large failures, and furthermore (though this may be more surprising) they can exist only in failures. The successful whole work, "being a complete fusion," has but one value. It has no beautiful *parts*, no merits (Ch. X, pp. 79–80).

accompany the argument. The notion of the successful intuition harbors a certain duplicity. For there is in the first place the struggle of any given intuition, more simple or less simple, to clarify itself upon the welter of half-known impression. And there is in the second place the achievement of the complex and rich Art intuition in all its superiority over the simpler kind. And these two conceptions constantly blend. Thus:

> On the hither side of the lower limit is sensation, formless matter, which the spirit can never apprehend in itself as simple matter. This it can only possess with form and in form. . . . How often do we strive to understand clearly what is passing within us! We do catch a glimpse of something, but this does not appear to the mind as objectified and formed.—Ch. I, p. 5

But a few pages later:

> The world which as a rule we intuit is a small thing. It consists of little expressions, which gradually become greater and wider with the increasing spiritual concentration of certain moments. They are the words we say to ourselves, our silent judgments: "Here is a man, here is a horse, this is heavy, this is sharp, this pleases me," etc. It is a medley of light and colour, with no greater pictorial value than would be expressed by a haphazard splash of colours, from among which one could barely make out a few special, distinctive traits. This and nothing else is what we possess in our ordinary life; this is the basis of our ordinary action. It is the index of a book. The labels tied to things (it has been said) take the place of the things themselves. This index and these labels (themselves expressions) suffice for small needs and small actions. From time to time we pass from the index to the book, from the label to the thing, or from the slight to the greater intuitions, and from these to the greatest and most lofty.
> —Ch. I, pp. 9–10

> This passage is sometimes far from easy. It has been observed by those who have best studied the psychology of artists that when, after having given a rapid glance at any one, they attempt to obtain a real intuition of him, in order, for example, to paint his portrait, then this ordinary vision, that seemed so precise, so lively, reveals itself as little better than nothing.—p. 10

It is to be observed that the dialectical and absolute importance attached initially in the system to the sheer act of intuition-expression becomes by degrees transferred to a special sort of intuition-expression, that which is "greater and wider." The ordinary, slight intuitions are actually described in a way that makes them sound like cliché concepts—"indexes of a book," "labels tied to things." The greater and wider intuition, of

the portrait painter, for instance, is then described as a "real intuition," and the "ordinary vision" sinks back into a status "little better than nothing"—i.e. into the status of sensation or impression. Yet in other passages of the book, where it suits him to be more consistent with his basic doctrine, Croce will say that any kind of intuition at all has an aesthetic worth equal to that of any other.

> Not only is the art of savages not inferior, as art, to that of civilized peoples, if it be correlative to the impressions of the savage; but every individual, indeed every moment of the spiritual life of the individual, has its artistic world; none of these worlds can be compared with any other in respect of artistic value.—Ch. XVII, p. 137

A double notion of "form" has extensive ramifications throughout the system. To take one example which may stand in general for the technical bearings of the difficulty: When Croce attempts to explain how it is that the intuition-expressions of Art do after all use a kind of conceptual language, an inheritance of ready-made forms and pre-fabricated bric-a-brac (words themselves, for instance, allusions, old saws, catch-words, aphorisms, and the like in poetry), he says that these elements do not enter into the new poem as forms but are first de-morphosed as it were, reduced and fused back into a state of mere "impression," formless stuff. An analogy from bronze-pouring seems ready to his purpose.

> He who conceives a tragedy puts into a crucible a great quantity, so to say, of impressions: expressions themselves, conceived on other occasions, are fused together with the new in a single mass, in the same way as we can cast into a melting furnace formless pieces of bronze and choicest statuettes. Those choicest statuettes must be melted just like the pieces of bronze, before there can be a new statue. The old expressions must descend again to the level of impressions, in order to be synthesized in a new single expression.—Ch. II, p. 20

But this analogy may not in fact read so smoothly. Do the conceptual materials (the old saws, catch words, and the like) which one finds in a poem really melt out of sight? Or don't they have to retain their form and meaning in order to operate poetically at all? To make the point in another way: there is a certain kind of form in the statuette—a kind that is absent in the "form*less*" pieces of bronze. But on the showing of Croce's own system, those pieces of bronze also have a form, the simpler intuition-expression which is the very form of our knowing them. And on an issue of intuition *versus* conception, there is no ground for discriminating between the statuette and the junk. The statuette does lose much

more than the junk in being melted down. But that is an issue of Art *versus* general intuition. We are back with the Plotinian piece of stone, which always has form, but sometimes has form *par excellence* by having an image carved on it.

IV

CROCE's theory is in a sense the most resolutely cognitive of all modern art theories. His fundamental division of spiritual activity into the cognitive and the volitional enables him to proceed with great clarity and authority in his dismissal of the affective art theories which he groups under the headings "hedonistic" (Ch. XI) and "sympathetic" (Ch. XII). Nevertheless, the affective element is one which his system has always had to cope with, and one which comes to have a more prominent role in works written after his *Aesthetic*. To account for the fact that in the presence of works of art one experiences not just aesthetic knowledge but aesthetic *pleasure*, Croce proposes in his *Aesthetic* that each of the four radical spiritual activities, as it succeeds or fails, is accompanied by a "special activity, of non-cognitive nature, having its two poles, positive and negative, in *pleasure* and *pain*" (Ch. X, p. 74).[6] Aesthetic pleasure is simply the feeling of pleasure which accompanies our successful acts of intuition-expression. But let us realize clearly (and this may cost some effort) that *each* one of the four main spiritual activities is accompanied by this special volitional act (or overtone) called "feeling." Not only activities of knowing (poetic and scientific) but activities of volition themselves (economic and ethical) have their accompaniment of volitional pleasure and pain. Not only does the scientist experience delight in the knowledge of his discovery—*eureka*—but he must experience another delight in the success of his wishing to make the discovery. A certain clarity in the cognitive area has been obtained at the expense of a very odd double situation in the volitional area. This perhaps betrays some conflict between the cognitive effort of Croce's art theory and what turns out to be his equally resolute affectivism in general value theory —by which judgments of value "follow instead of preceding the affirmation of the will, and are nothing but the expression of the volition already experienced" (Ch. VI, p. 49). Working back from such empty acts of willing and feeling (which have to be valued themselves by their own echo acts of feeling), we rule out feeling from the aesthetic act by saying that although it accompanies the act it has nothing to do with the character of the act. To put the matter another way, Croce's affective duplicity in the *Aesthetic* is one cost of his attempt to keep practical

[6] In another paragraph (p. 75) he says that this activity is just the same as "that more elementary and fundamental practical activity which we have distinguished from the ethical," i.e., just the same as economic or volitional activity in general.

activity, economic and ethical feeling, too severely distinct from aesthetic activity. Perhaps the difficulty has never been completely overcome. The "incipient" or "imaginal" responses of a later psychological theory of literature, for instance, or the purely contemplative pleasure of an earlier metaphysics, may share somewhat the same embarrassment. Yet there would appear to be something oddly maladroit and absent-minded about this aspect of Croce's thought.

It is in certain other passages of the *Aesthetic*, where he is concerned with the danger of consulting either author or audience in their moral activities, their feelings of guilt and innocence, that he makes his best comments, negative though they may be, on "feeling."

> Many legends in the biographies of artists have sprung from this erroneous identification [between knowing and willing], since it seemed impossible that a man who gives expression to generous feelings should not be a noble and generous man in practical life; or that the dramatist whose plays are full of stabbing, would not himself have done a little stabbing in real life. Artists protest vainly: "*Lasciva est nobis pagina, vita proba.*"
>
> —Ch. VI, p. 53

> What are these apparent or manifested feelings, but feelings objectified, intuited, expressed? And it is natural that they do not trouble and afflict us as passionately as those of real life, because those were matter, these are form and activity; those true and proper feelings, these intuitions and expressions.—Ch. X, p. 81 [7]

Croce has always been severe upon the mere display and indulgence of feeling in poetry and upon the critical method of being interested in authors themselves as feeling and willing beings.[8] Yet what, after all, of

[7] Three meanings of the term "feeling" are defined by Croce in his *Aesthetic* (Ch. II, p. 18; Ch. X, p. 74): 1. the volitional activity of pleasure or pain with which we have been dealing above; 2. feeling as passivity, matter, impression, inchoate knowledge; 3. feeling as "pure intuition"—i.e., intuition in its character as non-conceptual and non-historical, neither scientific nor factual. In the passage of *Aesthetic*, Chapter X quoted above, meanings 1 and 2 may be seen in fusion. In a passage which we are about to quote from Croce's *Britannica* article, the use of the term "feeling" in a shift from meaning 1 to meaning 3 is to be noted.

[8] Thus in an essay written as early as 1887: "It is not enough to feel. Feeling is nothing if hand is not ruled by intellect. In the work of Gaspara, self-revelation often remains a mere act of will, an intention. Gaspara sheds tears, but is not always in command of enough magic to transform them into pearls" (Luigi Russo, *La Critica Letteraria Contemporanea*, Bari, 1946, I, 133).

For very strong statements against attending to the author himself (under any practical aspect) instead of to his poetry, see Croce's opening Chapter on Shakespeare, *Ariosto, Shakespeare and Corneille* (New York, 1920), pp. 117 ff.; *The Poetry of Dante* (New York, 1922), pp. 27, 32; *Breviary of Aesthetics*, Rice Institute Pamphlets (Houston, 1915), pp. 13–14; and *La Poesia* (1936), p. 297: ". . . *non importa quel che il poeta si propone o vuol fare o crede di fare, ma unicamente quel che esso fa.*"

feeling and its role in art? Does it have only the same minor role as do the feelings of pleasure attendant on a successful scientific conceptualization, or (in the awkward doubling which we have noted) those attendant on the success of our economic and ethical volitions? Even the impropriety of reading the dramatist's own feelings into his play about murder and incest does not obviate the fact that the element of feeling is a very prominent part of the poem. This line of inquiry can lead to a view arrived at by Croce only some years after the writing of his *Aesthetic*[9] —that Artistic intuition-expression is precisely the intuition-expression of "feeling." Not the tumult of feeling felt by an author in his practical life, not feeling simply spilled out, confessed à la Rousseau, or exposed to public view. But precisely feeling intuited and expressed, feeling objectified, embodied and made knowable in the artistic act—in the linguistic act of the poem. The new and more precise name now bestowed upon Artistic intuition-expression was "lyrism" (*liricità*). Thus in his *Britannica* article, "the basis of all poetry is the moral consciousness." But:

> The feeling is altogether converted into images, into this complex of images and is thus a feeling that is contemplated and therefore resolved and transcended. Hence poetry must be called neither feeling, nor image, nor yet the sum of the two, but "contemplation of feeling," or "lyrical intuition," or (which is the same thing) "pure intuition"—pure, that is, of all historical and critical reference to the reality or unreality of the images of which it is woven, and apprehending the pure throb of life in its ideality.[1]

> The lyric is not a pouring forth; it is not a cry or a lament; it is an objectification in which the ego sees itself on the stage, narrates itself, and dramatizes itself; and this lyrical spirit forms the poetry both of epic and of drama, which are therefore distinguished from the lyric only by external signs.[2]

[9] The Preface to the 1907 edition of the *Aesthetic* alludes to the "lyrical nature of art" (trans. Ainslie, 1929, p. xxix). The earliest emphatic development of the idea seems to be the paper on "The Lyrical Character of Art" delivered at the Heidelberg Congress of 1908. A translation of this appears in the first English edition of the *Aesthetic*, 1909. The Italian text may be found in *Problemi di estetica*, 1910. Cf. *Autobiography*, trans. Collingwood, 1927, p. 102, "the concept of intuition in aesthetic now elaborated into that of lyrism."

[1] The end of this passage seems to revert to the special sense of "feeling" as "pure intuition" defined in the *Aesthetic* (Ch. II, p. 18). But the main sense of "feeling" in these *Britannica* passages is clearly closer to the ordinary affective-volitional sense.

[2] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th Edition, "Aesthetic," vol. I (1937), pp. 265, 268. Cf. *The Essence of Aesthetic* (London, 1921), pp. 32–3, "lyric" as synonymous with "art."

Croce has changed his definition of Art and of Art value by making feeling the required Art content or a prominent part of it. If we find a difficulty in squaring the new definition with his fundamental doctrine that to classify intuition-expressions in any way is to conceptualize and neutralize them, losing sight of the one aesthetically significant fact, the fullness and success of intuition-expression as "form," he will answer, no doubt, that the feeling itself is a kind of intensity or "throb" which has no specific coloration except from the cognitive character of the intuition-expression which it accompanies. On the plateau which he thus erects for himself, raising his early concept of the fullness and richness, the formal success, of the Artistic intuition more clearly into the strata of human ethical concerns, Croce is able to elaborate his views so as to accommodate much that appears more characteristically in other modern systems, those of the romantic Germans before him and those of his later expressionist and affectivist contemporaries. Thus in one of his *New Essays on Aesthetic* first collected in 1920 we find the doctrine of "lyrism" leaping exultantly into such affirmations as these.

> The particular throbs with the life of the whole intuition, and the whole exists in the life of the particular. Every pure artistic image is at one and the same time itself and the universe, the universe in this individual form and this individual form equivalent to the universe. In every word of the poet, in every act of his creative imagination, appears the whole of human destiny, all the hopes, illusions, sorrows and joys, the grandeur and misery, of the human state.
>
> To give to the contentual feeling an artistic form is to give it also the stamp of totality, the cosmic afflatus.
>
> Art is essentially free from practical interest, . . . because in art there is no suppression of any interest at all; rather art gives all our interests simultaneous free play in the image. It is only in this way that the individual image, transcending the particular and acquiring a value of totality, becomes concretely individual.[8]

Or in his Oxford lecture *The Defence of Poetry*, 1933, the following:

> The thoughts and actions and emotions of life, when sublimated to the subject-matter of poetry, are no longer the thought that judges, the action effectually carried out, the good and evil, or the joy and pain actually done or suffered. They are all now simply passions and feelings immediately assuaged and calmed, and transfigured in imagery. That is the magic of poetry: the union of calm and tumult, of passionate impulse with the con-

[8] *Nuovi saggi di estetica*, 3d ed. (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1948), pp. 122–5, "Il Carattere di totalità dell' espressione artistica."

> trolling mind which controls by contemplating. It is the triumph of contemplation, but a triumph still shaken by past battle, with its foot upon a living though vanquished foe. Poetic genius chooses a strait path in which passion is calmed and calm is passionate; a path that has on one side merely natural feeling, and on the other the reflection and criticism which is twice removed from nature; a path from which minor talents find it but too easy to slip into an art either convulsed and distorted by passion, or void of passion and guided by principles of the understanding. Then they are called "romantic" or "classical." [4]

V

LITERARY students have perhaps found their easiest sympathy with Croce, and their most profitable instruction, in the negative starting points of his polemic, and notably in his attack on such fixtures of the literary tradition as the classical "figures" of speech and thought, the classical literary species or genres and the rules of decorum long attached to these. (The theoretical part of his *Aesthetic* is here vigorously supplemented by his historical chapters.) All these classical technicalities, let it be remembered, had been taken at least implicitly, throughout centuries of criticism, as conceptions of value and prescriptions for obtaining value. To use a figure was to add an ornament to plainness and hence to score a point (*punctum*) on the tally sheet of the *dulce*. To violate the decorum of a genre, as in experimenting with a new lyric meter or with the hybrid of a pastoral tragi-comedy, was to court chaos or at least the sharply raised eyebrow of the critical arbiter. But to the inviolable general rule Croce opposes the inviolable individual—the individual which must not be touched by conceptual abstraction if it is to retain its aesthetic validity. (The beginning of his whole philosophy, as he himself has confessed, was his criticism of the genres.)

Croce takes ruthless advantage of the inescapable fact that no literary arbiter has ever succeeded in setting up a code which subsequent poets have not with equal success subverted. Though the poet's materials and even his forms in the grammatical and prosodic senses be conventional, yet it is his rule of craft that he must do something different with them. (Even if the little bronze image be not melted out of all identity, it must at least be somewhat twisted.) The *verba . . . parce detorta*, the *callida junctura* of Horace had long ago testified to this much. The most eloquent champion of genre theory in Croce's early days, Ferdinand Brunetière, was scarcely setting up as a legislator; he was only joining

[4] *The Defence of Poetry: Variations on the Theme of Shelley*, trans. E. F. Carritt (Oxford, 1933), p. 25, by permission of the Oxford University Press, Inc.

classical genre with Darwinism to create a frame of reference for the orderly exposition of literary history—*l'évolution des genres littéraires.* Something like that Croce himself would permit.[5] Yet such an exposition he would relegate to the dubious realm of literary history, a discipline which works "to some extent with generalizations and abstractions."

Croce's dogma is set sternly against all classification of expressions, all notions about the limits of a given art or about combinations of the arts (Ch. XV). It is set against anything like an intellectualization of the artistic meaning—against all analysis, all classification, all grammar,[6] all allegorizing, all rhetorical splits between "form" and "content," "ornament" and business, all conceptions of proper and "improper" ways of saying the same thing, all notions of homonym and synonym, and of literary translation. (If a metaphor is improper or an ornament external to the real meaning of an expression, why should it appear in the expression at all? If, on the other hand, it is really a proper part of the expression, why call it improper or ornamental?)

> Language is a perpetual creation. What has been linguistically expressed is not repeated, save by reproduction of what has already been produced. The ever-new impressions give rise to continuous changes of sound and meaning, that is, to ever-new expressions. To seek the model language, then, is to seek the immobility of motion.—Ch. XVIII, p. 150

> Language is not an arsenal of arms already made, and it is not a vocabulary, a collection of abstractions, or a cemetery of corpses more or less well embalmed.—p. 150

> We can elaborate logically what we have already elaborated in aesthetic form only; but we cannot reduce what has already possessed its aesthetic form to another form also aesthetic. Indeed, every translation either diminishes and spoils, or it creates a new expression, by putting the former back into the crucible and mingling it with the personal impressions of the so-called translator.—Ch. IX, p. 68

Croce makes a very damaging case not only against all the classic "paraphernalia" of criticism, but (and here the theory cuts to the quick

[5] "It may be asserted that the history of aesthetic productions shows progressive cycles. . . . When many are at work in a general way upon the same subject, without succeeding in giving to it the suitable form, yet drawing always more near to it, there is said to be progress, and when appears the man who gives it definite form, the cycle is said to be complete, and progress is ended" (Ch. XVII, p. 136).

[6] The "linguistic unit," says Croce, is the sentence: "Peteriswalkinginacountryroad." Any analysis of this into words, syllables, or syntax is an abstractive and more or less arbitrary act which does violence to its aesthetic integrity. One might be tempted to begin a critique of the Crocean system at just this point—with the question how one distinguishes a sentence from adjacent sentences of a linguistic discourse. And if such a distinction is valid, why not a distinction between words?

of even the modern critical consciousness) against every term that has ever taken on the least specific or technical coloring as a predicate in an attempt to define good poetry. Consider, he says, such opposed pairs of terms as *classical* and *romantic*, *symbolic* and *realistic*. Each of the four has been used as a term of positive valuing by a critic of a certain temper and can be used by us for the same purpose at a certain moment in a certain light—but blink your eyes, look again, and like the honeycomb cells of ambiguous perspective in the trick advertising sign, slanting now up, now down, the pair of critical terms will shift its value emphasis. *Classical* means either artistically perfect or coldly artificial; *romantic* means either warmly and truly expressive or sentimental and uncontrolled. *Realistic* means either mechanically imitative or vividly life-like; *symbolic* means either something that takes inspired liberties with reality or something that is stiffly allegorical. In short, any one of these terms can mean either *artistic* or *inartistic*. And no one of them, and no other critical term, has any privileged hold on the notion of the *artistic*. There is no such thing as specific, technical praise of an art work. All such terms when used for positive valuing—rhythm, meter, assonance, rhyme, metaphor, or what you please—are only synonyms for artistic form.[7] For neutral and scientific purposes you can move from the individual intuition into such abstractions, but you cannot move back again.

VI

THE total suppression of all critical discourse seems threatened. At the same time (and from Croce's own practice as a literary critic we may see this) he is scarcely in favor of such a suppression. He himself has defined the office of criticism as being to "discern and to point out exactly where lies the poetical motive." [8] Croce is always an interesting practical critic. He has given us some rather fine examples of a certain taste and of a certain critical idiom, the latter of which may or may not be exactly defined in the formula we have just quoted. Thus in his Oxford lecture *The Defence of Poetry*, the following exegesis of a single line by Racine.

> It is a delusion to suppose that a verse delights us by any sounds with which it stimulates our ears to ecstasy. What it stimulates to ecstasy is our imagination, and thereby our emotion. There is a verse of Racine which Théophile Gautier used to scan and declaim with gusto, and which other disciples of preciosity are in the habit of reciting as absolutely unmeaning and yet, or rather

[7] Ch. IX, pp. 70–1.

[8] *Ariosto, Shakespeare and Corneille*, trans. Douglas Ainslie (New York, 1920), pp. 147.

for that reason, the only beautiful verse which the poet ever succeeded in writing:

La fille de Minos et de Pasiphaé

That is certainly beautiful, but not in virtue of the physical combination of its sounds. One might make infinite other combinations of such sounds without producing any effect of beauty. It is beautiful because these sounds, these syllables and accents, bring before us, in an instantaneous imaginative fusion, all that was mysterious and sinister, all that was divine and fiendish, all that was majestic and perverted, both in the person and in the parentage of Phaedra. And this is expressed by two epic names, that of the royal Cretan legislator and that of his incestuous wife, at whose side rises in our imagination, the brutal figure of the bull.[9]

Croce's criticism demonstrates a firm grasp on the nature of the verbal art expression (or in fact on the nature of all art expression as distinct from simply sensory pleasure). He has a fine flair for exploring the implicit meanings and hence the imaginative unity of poetic passages. Join with these facts his statements, already quoted, concerning the highly complex "totality" which he recognizes in a work of literary art—and we may be led to hope that in Croce has been discovered the patron theorist of the practical literary critic.

Yet a certain contradictory simplism may have been suggested in that definition of the critic's office which we have quoted—to "discern the poetical motive." And despite Croce's many eloquent pronouncements to the contrary, there is more than a hint here too of a genetic and biographical standard. Though he avoids the "Practical Personality" of Shakespeare, it is not, after all, the plays which he would take instead, but the "Poetic Personality." The classification of the spirit, the literary characterization (*caratteristica*), hovers between the single work and the author's whole output, the latter seeming to form some kind of necessary whole. Literary "history" is proper if it confines itself to the work of a single author, a single spirit, improper if it tries to include more.[1] "Criticism," wrote Croce in a letter not many months before his death, "does not require anything else than to know the true sentiment of the poet in the representative form in which he has translated it. Any other demand is extraneous to the question." [2]

"Sentiment" and "spirit" tend strongly, in Croce's thinking, to be

[9] *The Defence of Poetry*, p. 23, by permission of the Oxford University Press, Inc. See his glowing analysis of a passage from Virgil in the *Britannica* article.

[1] "*La riforma della storia artistica e letteraria*," in *Nuovi saggi di estetica*, 3rd ed. (Bari, 1948), pp. 157 ff., cited by René Wellek, "Benedetto Croce," *Comparative Literature*, V (Winter, 1953), 76.

[2] Wellek, *Comparative Literature*, V, 77.

conceived as indivisible. They may flash out in a short lyric burst as well as in a whole work, perhaps more likely in the short burst. We recall the doctrine of the *Aesthetic* according to which unsuccessful works have, with reference to their wholeness, only "merits," not beauties, though each merit is in itself a beauty. One might have suspected Croce of an extreme fastidiousness with regard to nominal wholes, of a great readiness to look through long works for their most striking merits, their passages of "pure lyrism" (as Edgar Allan Poe thought a long poem a contradiction in terms and the best of "long poems" only a series of short poems linked by prose). And as a matter of fact this kind of anthological reading is quite prominent in Croce's criticism. He treats Goethe's *Faust*, for instance, almost as an album or commonplace book in which Goethe entered his feelings at various times.[3] He writes of Corneille:

> We care nothing for the canvas, but only for what of embroidery in the shape of poetry there is upon it.
>
> The poetry of Corneille, or what of poetry there is in him, is all to be found in the lyrical quality of the volitional situations, in those debates, remarks, solemn professions of faith, energetic assertions of the will, in that superb admiration for . . . personal, unshakable firmness. Here it is that we must seek it, not in the development of the dramatic action or in the character of the individual personages.
>
> We must insist that those four tragedies [*Le Cid*, *Horace*, *Polyeucte*, *Cinna*], like those that followed them, are not to be read by the lover of poetry otherwise than in an anthological manner.[4]

What might not at first come home to the unprepared reader is that Croce is not here speaking of what he supposes to be badly structured plays, in contrast to better structured, which it would be worth while reading as wholes. The truth is that he looks on the grosser architecture of any verbal work at all as a matter of very small moment, even of aesthetic irrelevance. He tends to associate structure with the mere intentions of the author, something to be known only abstractly and apart from the sentiment and imagination which is the poetry.[5] The structure of Dante's *Commedia* is what pertains to the "theological-political romance,"

[3] Wellek, *Comparative Literature*, V, 77.

[4] *Ariosto, Shakespeare and Corneille*, trans. Douglas Ainslie, pp. 407, 408, 414. Copyright, 1920, by Henry Holt and Company. Copyright, 1948, by Douglas Ainslie. By permission of the publishers.

[5] Wellek, *Comparative Literature*, V, 77, citing "*Recenti lavori tedeschi di critica del* Faust," in Croce's *Goethe*, 4th ed. (Bari, 1946), II, 101.

around which the actual poetry clings like luxuriant vegetation.[6] His statement concerning Shakespeare is perhaps the most shocking of all.

> Certainly, it would be possible to take one of the plays of Shakespeare, or all of them, one after another, and . . . to illustrate their aesthetic coherence and to point out the delicacy of treatment, bit by bit, scene by scene, accent by accent, word by word. . . . This insistence upon analysis and eulogy will be of special value to those who do not immediately understand of themselves. . . . But it does not form part of our object in writing this treatise, nor does it appear to form part of the duty of Shakespearean criticism, for Shakespeare is one of the clearest and most evident of poets, capable of being perfectly understood by men of slight or elementary culture.[7]

It would seem to follow that when Croce in his *Britannica* article asserts the unity of lyric, dramatic, and epic poetry, he does not mean that lyric, dramatic and epic are three *different* ways of realizing the same poetic quality (each having its own special features, approximate laws, and the like) but that epic and dramatic are literally to be read as collections of lyric passages framed together in a largely irrelevant structure of plot and character. Despite all his disavowals, then, he takes his place as the ultimate romantic critic, exhibiting a strong similarity to that far-off harbinger, sometimes considered the first romantic critic, the author of the *Peri Hupsous,* who also frankly confessed his belief that the poetic ecstasy is a thing that occurs only in short spurts of energy, sudden flashes.[8]

VII

In trying to assess the Crocean system, one may be tempted to write a kind of balance sheet. To the credit of the system, let it be set down clearly that it is devoted to the discouragement of all didactic criticism, all scientific, realistic, informational, and baldly mimetic norms, and also the overtly intentionalistic, inspirational and biographical. It discourages likewise all kinds of criticism according to the literary species and according to rules, or, as this is nowadays called (in the terminology

[6] *La Poesia di Dante,* 6th ed. (Bari, 1948), p. 59 (Wellek, *Comparative Literature,* V, 77).

[7] *Ariosto, Shakespeare and Corneille,* pp. 280–3.

[8] In the bewildering range of Croce's work one finds of course a certain number of statements in favor of conceptual criticism and of art as artifice or making, and against merely impressionistic criticism. Critics, he says once, should be reminded of the prohibition posted in some German concert halls: "*Das Mitsingen ist verboten.*" Wellek, *Comparative Literature,* V, 80–1, citing *Poesia popolare e poesia d'arte* (1933) and *Nuovi saggi di estetica,* 3rd ed. (Bari, 1948), pp. 233 ff.

promoted by Richards), criticism by technical presuppositions or general critical preconceptions. It discourages ornamentalism and every other separation of form from content, means from end. At the same time, if only certain clauses of the system are consulted (those concerning fullness, richness and unity of intuitions, harmony of interests and totality), then it will seem to encourage a study of literary parts in relation to wholes and a synthetic understanding of the art work. And lastly, the Crocean system more or less encourages the right kind of historical study, the reconstruction of the conditions, the vocabulary of ready meanings, which enter into the meaning of the work itself.

But on the other hand, and against the system, it must be set down that it inclines in some of its clauses to promote an exaggerated respect for the author himself (if not as a practical personality, yet as a poetic personality) and that in its emphasis on the unexternalized intuition it has favorably influenced (at least in the English-speaking world) the early 20th-century trend toward critical standards of sincerity, spontaneity, authenticity. In the same way, it has contributed its influence to the sway of critical impressionism. By the mere fact that it is a form of monistic expressionism and idealism, it has tended to undercut the notion of real values and hence to remove the background against which even an idealistic theory of art values must make its claims. Lastly, and this is the most serious complaint that must be made, in the zeal of his anathema against the classical paraphernalia, Croce moves on to prohibit in effect all critical analysis and hence all consideration of literary works as integrated objects or as complexes of meaning, and all distinctions between symbolic and literal structures of meaning. He forbids us in short to do anything for the critical enrichment of our intuitions. We are asked to remain content with the lightning flash. In the chapters of his *Aesthetic* on the history of art (XVI and XVII) he seems to face the fact that we can ultimately arrive at a better intuition of a whole through a conceptual analysis of its elements, but he does not like to extend this view into actual criticism—unless perhaps to the criticism of a short passage, a single line, like that of Racine's which he analyzes with such fervor. It is as if Croce can observe the fact of synthesis and contextual modification of elements within a small compass, but that the same thing in a wider perspective of plot, character, act and scene, forces the notion of abstractive conception upon him and leads him to speak of mere structural intentions and argumentative purposes. In insisting that the statuette must be melted to enter into a larger work of art, he forgets the gargoyle upon the cathedral—and he forgets that the small image if only it is allowed to retain its form can be *trans*formed by various juxtapositions with other objects and by the play of various lights upon its own shape.

The problems which we have been sketching are not the peculiar

product of Crocean thinking. They are rather some of the most permanent problems of criticism, which Croce succeeds in bringing to a stage of acute even painful realization for the literary student who is faced with the practical need of talking about literary works. Croce perhaps more powerfully than any other modern aesthetician sums up and completes an era of idealistic and expressionistic thinking about art. He polarizes the philosophy of the art work as a uniquely individual organization and as an expression of spirit and hence a creation (ordered by its own laws) rather than an imitation (ordered by the laws of something external to itself). This philosophy, if one attempts to take it as all in all, is probably not enough to enable the survival either of art criticism or of art. Yet it is a pole of thought and reality which has always and unremittingly (whether critics were aware of the fact or not) exerted its energy toward the modification of too simple or too rigid norms of external reference or mimesis—just as those classical norms in turn, along with the affective norms which reach full discussion only in modern times, inevitably exert their own energy to subvert the monistic form of expressionism. We may venture the minimal and summary statement that today it has become almost impossible for the literary critic or historian to use classical conceptions of mimetic decorum or rhetorical affectivity without some tempering awareness of the Crocean critique.

Croce's influence in the English-speaking world has been most readily traceable in the names of his British translators and commentators, Collingwood, Carritt, Walkley, Carr, and in the work of expressionist aestheticians like the American C. J. Ducasse in his early phase, and more broadly in other aesthetic thinking, like Bosanquet's quasi-hedonist *Three Lectures on Aesthetic* of 1923, or even in thinking of a distinctly rival cast. A few years before they died, Croce and John Dewey confronted each other in the *American Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* the former making large claims of paternity upon the experiential and pragmatist aesthetic of the latter, and the latter irritably alluding to the pervasiveness of the concepts at stake. Literary critics have been on the whole less likely to advertise their indebtedness to Croce—though the "new criticism" sponsored in America by the historian J. E. Spingarn about 1910 was clamorously Crocean, and doubtless a number of acknowledgements might be cited as paralleling that made by the Scotch professor Lascelles Abercrombie in his *Theory of Poetry,* 1926—to Aristotle, Croce, and "common sense." The influence of Croce has been like that of Kant in the era 1800 to 1840 in France, of a pervasive and atmospheric kind, blending with a generally favorable climate of opinion so as not always to be clearly distinguishable.

SUPPLEMENT

In Richmond this month, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, instead of allowing the customary five-man jury to select its biennial of contemporary U.S. painting, has set a precedent that could be profitably followed by other and larger institutions the country over. To avoid what the Richmond director, Leslie Cheek, Jr., says of the previous juried exhibitions—"the selections inevitably represented compromises"—he invited, for the 1950 event, a one man jury and special director in the person of James Johnson Sweeney. Mr. Sweeney's philosophy and operating policy (with full power to select, invite and hang the exhibition) are set forth by him in the following pages.
. . . the *succès de scandale* of the first night was not an abstract painting at all, but a distinguished romantic realist, Hyman Bloom, with his *Female Corpse*. . . . Nobody seemed to take *that* as a metaphor, proving once more that most Americans can accept their symbolism in the form of anything, including trade-marks and jingling commercials, so long as it isn't symbolical realism. Even so, it would have been impossible to foresee the violence and the pathetic rage with which the Bloom was greeted. An editorial the next morning in the *Richmond Times-Despatch* went a long way toward a U.S. record for malapropism and bad taste: it began by disqualifying itself in ranking Mr. Sweeney's choice with its own evaluation of Joyce's *Ulysses*, "A tongue-in-cheek pretense of 'erudition' which must be seen to be properly deprecated." But it concluded with an attack on the Virginia Museum's source of income in state funds, implying that they could be cut off for showing "corpses"—which is serious business indeed.

The Bloom (any similarity in name to characters in James Joyce's *Ulysses* is entirely accidental) is, in the writer's opinion and that of many others, an important American picture. In its subject matter, of course, it shares some identity and apparently a momentary fate with that of Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* and Courbet's *Burial at Ornans*. With them, it violates the sacred bourgeois tabu that the cadaver is never brought into the parlor except for the actual funeral party. And, with them, its fate will be to remain misunderstood until the metaphor is discovered beneath the superficial reality.

—Alfred M. Frankfurter, *Art News*, XLIX (May, 1950), 17, "Vernissage: One Man's Corpse"

Queries: Why is this only a bourgeois tabu? Why isn't it a good tabu? Who are the people who ordinarily bring the cadaver into the parlor? For what purposes? What is the metaphor he is talking about? Why isn't this just pretentious hot air? Is it? A look into Art News *for May, 1950, where Bloom's "Female Corpse, Back View, 1947" is reproduced on p. 18, might lead to a fruitful series of revelations and speculations concerning the "ugly" in graphic art.*

. . .

Let us now stop and restate the ideas which we are considering in relation to one another. The first is that the style of a poem and the poem itself are one; the second is that the style of the gods and the gods themselves are one; the third is that in an age of disbelief, when the gods have come to an end, when we think of them as the aesthetic projections of a time that has passed, men turn to a fundamental glory of their own and from that create a style of bearing themselves in reality. They create a new style of a new bearing in a new reality. This third idea, then, may be made to conform to the way in which the other two have been expressed by saying that the style of men and men themselves are one. Now, if the style of a poem and the poem itself are one; if the style of the gods and the gods themselves are one; and if the style of men and men themselves are one; and if there is any true relation between these propositions, it might well be the case that the parts of these propositions are interchangeable. Thus, it might be true that the style of a poem and the gods themselves are one; or that the style of the gods and the style of men are one; or that the style of a poem and the style of men are one. As we hear these things said, without having time to think about them, it sounds as if they might be true, at least as if there might be something to them. Most of us are prepared to listen patiently to talk of the identity of the gods and men. But where does the poem come in? And if my answer to that is that I am concerned primarily with the poem and that my purpose this morning is to elevate the poem to the level of one of the major significances of life and to equate it, for the purpose of discussion, with gods and men, I hope it will be clear that it comes in as the central interest, the fresh and foremost object.

—Wallace Stevens, *Two or Three Ideas*, Chapbook Published by the College English Association as a Supplement to *The CEA Critic*, XIII (October, 1951), pp. 4–5, by permission of the University of Pennsylvania Press

When gods and men turn into each other, curiously it is the poem (initially the medium for effecting such transvaluations) which begins to have a hard time maintaining its identity and calls out for salvaging. Wallace Stevens' subtly twisted essay in poetico-theology may be consulted as a plenary illustration of what occurs when the idealistic and fictional view of the world makes a present and urgent threat to take over.

CHAPTER 24

THE HISTORICAL METHOD: A RETROSPECT

§ *the idea of history, early bibliographies, history as decline, as progress, Ancients and Moderns, the rationalist stance—II. reactions, Dryden, Gildon, the medical analogy, Thomas Warton on* The Faerie Queene, *Hurd,* Letters on Chivalry and Romance, *the Gothic norm, French parallels, Chatterton, Macpherson—III. Temple,* Of Ancient and Modern Learning, *cyclic primitivism, Vico, Hurd,* Elizabethan Dialogue, *Thomas Warton's* History, *three ages of English literature, Hazlitt's* Lectures on the English Poets, *Peacock and Shelley again, romantic and classical dialectic —IV. Warton again, studying old poetry, Germanic complications, national spirit, Carlyle, French determinism, Taine,* History of English Literature, *race, milieu, and moment—V. scholarly achievements of 19th century, the personal and the genuine, scientific evidence, alliance of antiquarianism and genius, tough techniques and emotive interests, "expression"—VI. personal studies, Schiller and Goethe, Taine's devotion, Sainte-Beuve, Shandean depth, Browning and the Shelley letters, Furnivall's comment, Percy's folio, Mrs. Brown of Falkland, forged imagination, Ossian, Skeat and Chatterton, Andrew Lang and Sir Walter Scott, Bentley and Cicero—VII. aestheticism again, Oxford Hegelianism, Leslie Stephen, John Morley, Courthope's* History, *the* Cambridge History, *decline in historical theory, art of praise, Gosse* et al., *literary scientism, Professor Sherman counting words, Johns Hopkins, the Modern Language Association of America, conflux of motives, the new era, Professor Price's address, vogue of Taine and Brunetière, science and the socio-real—VIII. recent complexities, History of Ideas, A. O. Lovejoy,* ELH, *affinities for literary criticism, Geoffrey Tillotson,*

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the original meaning, F. W. Bateson, the elite audience, dissatisfaction of the critic, Lionel Trilling, "The Sense of the Past," "extra-aesthetic authority," contemporaneity, dating and genuineness, tabloid of ambiguities §

IN SEVERAL EARLIER CHAPTERS [1] WE HAVE ALLUDED TO THE ROLE WHICH the idea of history, or the consciousness of history, has played during modern times in determining conceptions of literature and of literary study. We have noticed the questions about literary progress which appeared in the quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns during the latter 17th century, the notion of poetry as the evolving expression of racial or national history which occupied German romantic thought from the time of Herder on, and the Hegelian complication of historic process into dialectic idealism and the results of such philosophy during the 19th and 20th centuries, especially in Russian and French theories about the sociologically didactic function of literature. The present chapter aims at giving a somewhat more special account of how modern professional literary studies have developed in the direction of historical method.

In a very simple way historical method began to find an entrance into literary study through early modern attempts at writing literary chronicle—early nationalistic inclinations to look back over certain centuries and to catalogue authors, manuscripts, or printed books, as in the bibliographies of English literature compiled by Leland, c. 1545, Bale, 1548 and 1557, Tanner, 1748, or Mackenzie, 1708–22.[2] But such interests could not continue very long without becoming involved in complications.

The medieval and early Renaissance ages of criticism looked on literary norms as very safely fixed and enduring and on the history of literature—like that of civilization in general—as a decline from a Golden Age. The history of the world had exhibited a lamentable decline of "coherence." [3] But the early 17th century in England saw the rapid rise, under Baconian scientific auspices, of the idea that modern pigmy men might by standing on the shoulders of ancient giants reach even a little higher than they. The end of the century moved on the full sweep of

[1] Chapters 11, 17, 21, 22.

[2] See Wellek, *Rise*, pp. 4–5, 135. This chapter owes a great deal in various places not only to Professor Wellek's *Rise of English Literary History* and to various published essays of his which will be acknowledged in the notes but to two manuscript essays: "English Literary History during the Romantic Age" (read at the Indianapolis meeting of the Modern Language Association in 1941) and "English Literary Historiography in the Victorian Age" (read at the New York meeting of the Modern Language Association in 1944).

[3] Cf. Victor Harris, *All Coherence Gone* (Chicago, 1949).

the rationalist theory that history had been a steady progress from barbaric shadows toward the clear light of the new age. In literature, this was the Modernist view of a direct clear progress from the medieval quaintness of Chaucer toward the correctness in diction and verse of the Augustans. France had taken somewhat of a lead and had provided a model. Back toward the beginning of the century Malherbe had arrived ("enfin Malherbe vint") to purify French style. And at the end, Boileau, though he battled against Modernist pretensions and claimed his authority only "in right of Horace," could nevertheless be said to "reign." The concept of a modern progress had to be more or less accommodated (as we have seen, for instance, in Pope's *Epistle to Augustus*) inside a wider panorama of the Ancient and Modern world. The cycle from Chaucer to Pope was paralleled by the ancient Roman cycle from Ennius to Horace. Still the Augustan emphasis was heavily on modern perfection and on the limping steps which preceding generations had taken toward this state. This was classicism stiffened by the Cartesian accent. The same reasonable spirit which when operating by itself would relegate poetry to a role of outmoded enchanter's gibberish, would when it was allied with the literary spirit assert the principle of literary progress and of modern supremacy in correctness. This Augustan attitude, so well known nowadays to literary historians, was to survive throughout the 18th century and, less conspicuously, even into the 19th. The Elizabethanism of a Coleridge, a Hazlitt, or a Lamb was contemporary with numerous antithetic expressions. Elizabethan prose, Nathan Drake would say, was "quaint, uncouth and tedious, insufferably prolix." It was afflicted with a "barbarous and pedantic stiffness." [4] All poets before Surrey, said Surrey's editor of 1815, George F. Nott, "must be read in reference to the particular age in which they lived. . . . But of this allowance Surrey never stands in need." There is "hardly anything in all his writings to remind us that he lived nearly three hundred years ago." [5]

II

THAT was approximately the rationalist stance, or the classical stance as fortified by the scientific spirit. But it had already, for over a hundred years, been serving as a point of departure for several kinds of liberal

[4] *Essays, Biographical and Historical, Illustrative of the Tatler, Spectator and Guardian* (1805), II, 3-4.

[5] *The Works of Henry Howard Earl of Surrey and of Sir Thomas Wyatt the Elder* (London, 1815), I, cclii. "Entire passages might be quoted which have all the appearance of having been written in the purest times of modern literature; nor could they be distinguished from the most finished periods of either Pope or Dryden. This is an improvement which reason and judgment must approve as one of the highest importance to our literature."

reaction. The least aggressive kind might be described as merely a plea for tolerance, for giving the literature of ruder ages a square deal. Don't let a man be tried by the laws of a country of which he is not a citizen. Ignorance, in literature as in morals, is some extenuation of guilt. This, however, could easily turn into some such more liberal demand as—simply: Let us not dispute about the different tastes of different times and places! Or, again, with the cutting edge turned in a new direction: Perhaps it was the classic law-givers who were ignorant; they might have changed their minds if they had seen what we have seen.

> The climate, the age, the disposition of the people, to whom a poet writes, may be so different, that what pleased the Greeks would not satisfy an English audience.
>
> It is not enough that Aristotle has said so, for Aristotle drew his models of tragedy from Sophocles and Euripides; and if he had seen ours, might have changed his mind.[6]

Various scientific analogies might support the argument. Charles Gildon, answering an attack by William Walsh on the artificiality of modern love verses, first insinuates a relative aesthetic on the analogy of medical science:

> Our Physicians have found the Prescripts of *Hippocrates* very Defective; And as in Physic, so in Poetry, there must be a regard had to the Clime, Nature, and Customs of the People; for the Habits of the Mind as well as those of the Body, are influenc'd by them; and *Love* with the other Passions vary in their *Effects* as well as *Causes*, according to each Country and Age; nay, according to the very Constitution of each Person affected.[7]

But later—shading tolerance into preference:

> Regard must be had to the *Humour*, *Custom*, and *Inclination* of the Auditory; but an *English* Audience will never be pleas'd with a dry, Jejune and formal Method that excludes Variety as the Religious observation of the Rules of *Aristotle* does.[8]

[6] Dryden, *Heads of an Answer to Rymer*, c. 1677, in *Critical and Miscellaneous Prose Works*, ed. Edmond Malone (London, 1800), I, ii, 305–6.

[7] *Miscellaneous Letters and Essays*, ed. Gildon (London, 1694), "An Essay and a Vindication of the Love-Verses of Cowley and Waller," p. 210, quoted by R. F. Jones, "Science and Criticism in the Neo-Classical Age of English Literature," *JHI*, I (October, 1940), 393. Jones cites Marchamont Nedham, *Medela Medicinae*, 1665, for the argument that diseases and remedies vary according to countries, times, and nations. Cf. Jones, *Ancients and Moderns* (St. Louis, 1936), p. 216.

[8] *Miscellaneous Letters*, p. 223, "To my Honoured and Ingenuous Friend Mr. Harrington, for the Modern Poets against the Ancients." In Thomas Killigrew's comedy *Chit-Chat*, 1719, a character remarks that he would as soon receive medical treatment by the rules of Hippocrates and Galen as see a play written by the rules of Aristotle and Horace (Jones, *JHI*, I, 395).

The argument for tolerance of various tastes and times might be used in favor of an earlier time (that of Chaucer or Shakespeare) when that time was criticized too rigorously by modern classical critics, or the same argument for tolerance might be used in favor of the modern time when that time was criticized too rigorously by the norms of classical antiquity. In this variation, the argument, though using comparative or relativistic premises, could actually swing into support of the classico-scientific notion of simple linear progress.

But the argument for the *earlier* time, the apology for Shakespeare or Chaucer as innocent violators of rules they never made, is that which had the greater immediate future. It was this which developed strongly during the 18th century as Thomas Warton and other writers took up apologetic themes invented two centuries earlier by Italian defenders of romance epic, but heard only now and then, as in an essay by Chapelain (*En Lisant les Vieux Romans*) [9] during the century of French classicism. Thus Warton in his *Observations on the Faerie Queene of Spenser*, 1754:

> In reading the works of an author who lived in a remote age, it is necessary, that we should look back upon the customs and manners which prevailed in his age; that we should place ourselves in his situation, and circumstances. . . . For want of this caution, too many readers view the knights and damsels, the turnaments and enchantments of Spenser with modern eyes, never considering that the encounters of Chivalry subsisted in our author's age . . . that romances were then most eagerly and universally read; and that thus, Spenser from the fashion of his age, was naturally dispos'd to undertake a recital of chivalrous achievements, and to become, in short, a ROMANTIC POET.[1]

> But it is absurd to think of judging either Ariosto or Spenser by precepts which they did not attend to. We who live in the days of writing by rule, are apt to try every composition by those laws which we have been taught to think the sole criterion of excellence. Critical taste is universally diffused, and we require the same order and design which every modern performance is expected to have, in poems where they never were regarded or intended. Spenser, and the same may be said of Ariosto, did not live in an age of planning. His poetry is the careless exuberance of a warm imagination and a strong sensibility. It was his business to engage the fancy, and to interest the attention by bold

[9] Cf. Victor M. Hamm, "A Seventeenth-Century Source for Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*," *PMLA*, LII (1937), 820–8.

[1] *Observations* (1754), Section X, p. 217.

> and striking images, in the formation, and the disposition of which, little labour or art was applied. The various and the marvellous were the chief sources of delight. Hence, we find our author ransacking alike the regions of reality and romance, of truth and fiction, to find the proper decorations and furniture for his fairy structure. Born in such an age, Spenser wrote rapidly from his own feelings, which at the same time were naturally noble. Exactness in his poem, would have been like the cornice which a painter introduced in the grotto of Calypso. Spenser's beauties are like the flowers in Paradise.[2]

Warton teeters from the accent of apology toward the accent of triumph. He wavers between saying that in order to read an old author we ought to know the customs, favorite books, and literary laws of the time when he wrote [3] and saying that if through better historical knowledge we do learn to read an old author, we may find that in him after all, rather than in our classically correct contemporaries, is the true spirit of poetry. How far this wavering represents an indecision on Warton's part (a conflict between the Augustan ideas in which he had been educated and the Spenserian poetry by which he felt himself attracted) or how far it was a strategy of getting a foot in the door before shoving, is a matter scarcely relevant to the present inquiry.[4] In the *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* published by Warton's friend and correspondent Bishop Richard Hurd in the same year (1762) as the second edition of Warton's *Observations*, the accent of apology [5] has become almost incidental to a far more excited manifesto in favor of the Gothic norm.

> The greatest geniuses of our own and foreign countries, such as Ariosto and Tasso in Italy, and Spenser and Milton in England, were seduced by these barbarities of their forefathers: were even charmed by the Gothic Romances. Was this caprice and absurdity in them, Or, may there not be something in the Gothic Romance peculiarly suited to the views of a genius, and to the

[2] Second edition, 1762, Section I (I, 21). Cf. the encomium of Chaucer, 1754, Section V, p. 142.

[3] For similar, if more generalized, statements of this part of the historical argument, see Samuel Johnson's *Miscellaneous Observations on Macbeth*, 1745, and *Preface* to Shakespeare, 1765.

[4] Cf. D. Nichol Smith, *Warton's History of English Poetry* (London, 1929), pp. 1–5, 27–9. Modern scholarship concerning Warton and his friend Hurd resounds with the question whether they were really "romantics" and rebels. See, for instance, R. D. Havens, "Thomas Warton and the Eighteenth-Century Dilemma," *SP*, XXV (1928), 50; Odell Shepard, "Thomas Warton and the Historical Point of View in Criticism," *JEGP*, XVI (1917), 153–63; Hoyt Trowbridge, "Bishop Hurd: A Reinterpretation," *PMLA*, LVIII (June, 1943), 450–65.

[5] See Letter VIII on examining a Gothic structure by Grecian rules.

> ends of poetry, And may not the philosophic moderns have gone too far, in their perpetual ridicule and contempt of it? [6]

> We are upon enchanted ground, my friend; and you are to think yourself well used that I detain you no longer in this fearful circle. The glimpse, you have had of it, will help your imagination to conceive the rest. And without more words you will readily apprehend that the fancies of our modern bards are not only more gallant, but, on a change of the scene, more sublime, more terrible, more alarming, than those of the classic fablers. In a word, you will find that the *manners* they paint, and the *superstitions* they adopt, are the more poetical for being Gothic.[7]

We arrive, then, at romantic primitivism—the notion that the poetry of uncivilized times, or poetry written about uncivilized times, is the most natural, the most directly human, the most powerfully emotional—pathetic and sublime—and is hence the best. It was about this time that in France Rousseau exploited the political and educational idea that human suffering proceeds from the artificiality of civilization. Diderot was saying that the more a people is civilized and polished, the less are its customs poetic. Everything civilized weakens and sweetens.[8] Condillac's *Traité sur l'Art d'écrire* (1775) draws a sharp contrast between the ages of vivid imagination and succeeding ages of analysis, taste and criticism. In England appeared the primitivistic forgeries of Chatterton (giving his age a stronger taste of the 15th century) and of Macpherson (giving the age what it wanted, a Homer of the Celtic dawn).[9] The issue of "poetic diction" (peasant or aristocratic?) which we have noted in the debate between Wordsworth and Coleridge was one of the more precise and grammatically defined issues produced by the trend of primitivism.

III

THE doctrine of primitivism was a stark contradiction to the Augustan notion of linear progress from barbarism. A simple view of progress was

[6] Letter I, p. 81. Cf. Letter VI, p. 108: Homer, had he had the opportunity, would have "preferred" the "feudal ages" for their "improved gallantry" and "the superior solemnity of their superstitions."

[7] Letter VI, p. 113. Cf. Letter XII, p. 154, "a world of fine fabling."

[8] *Oeuvres*, ed. Assézat-Tourneur, VII, 370.

[9] Macpherson's *Dissertation Concerning the Poems of Ossian*, published with *Temora* in 1763, observes that "The nobler passions of the mind never shoot forth more free and unrestrained than in the times we call barbarous. That irregular manner of life, and those manly pursuits, from which barbarity takes its name, are highly favorable to a strength of mind unknown in polished times. In advanced society, the characters of men are more uniform and disguised. The human passions lie in some degree concealed behind forms and artificial manners; and the powers of the soul, without an opportunity of exerting them, lose their vigor" (second paragraph).

countered by an equally simple view of effete decline. Some complication of this procedure was, however, possible. The Augustan view itself, as we have noticed, had required the contemplation of two classical or Augustan ages, the ancient and the modern. In his essays *Of Poetry* and *Of Ancient and Modern Learning*, 1690, Sir William Temple had given this frame of reference a twist toward the primitivistic by arguing that the modern situation was not a peak of poetical achievement but somewhere on a downslope toward effeteness. Such a complication was in effect the meeting of the Augustan and the primitive notions and the reduction of each, as purely conceived, to the status of an inferior extreme. Yet it was a complication too that was almost bound to favor the primitive somewhat over the classical. For if poetry had risen, it could have risen only from some state of uneducated rudeness, and if it had ever declined, it could have declined only into some state of *over*civilized effeteness. The scheme was bound to be viewed from its forward end (no society of theorizers could possibly see themselves as sunk in barbarism). The theorizers were bound to look back to a less theoretical, more imaginative, golden age. The earliest elaborate version of such a cyclic primitivism is perhaps to be found in Vico's theory of the imaginative rise of human institutions (his ages of patriarch and myth, of king and emblem, of society and law) expounded in the *Scienza Nuova* of 1725. Vico was not known in England during the 18th century. But his ideas would not have been out of place. In one of Bishop Hurd's Elizabethan *Dialogues*, often printed along with his *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, occurs the following very adequate general statement.

> There is, I think, in the revolutions of taste and language, a certain point, which is more favourable to the purposes of poetry, than any other. It may be difficult to fix this point with exactness. But we shall hardly mistake in supposing it lies somewhere between the rude essays of uncorrected fancy, on the one hand, and the refinements of reason and science, on the other.
>
> And such appears to have been the condition of our language in the age of Elizabeth. It was pure, strong, and perspicuous, without affectation. At the same time, the high figurative manner, which fits a language so peculiarly for the uses of the poet, had not yet been controlled by the prosaic genius of philosophy and logic.[1]

Both the simpler primitivistic contrast (between imagination and reason, between elemental passion and social criticism) and some kind of cyclic

[1] *Hurd's Letters on Chivalry and Romance with the Third Elizabethan Dialogue*, ed. Edith J. Morley (London, 1911), pp. 71–2. The dialogue is the third of Hurd's eight *Moral and Political Dialogues*, and the first of two dialogues on Elizabethan topics. The *Dialogues* were first published in 1759.

elaboration were 18th-century commonplaces which carried well through the theorizing of the romantic period. Thomas Warton's *History of English Poetry*, 1774–81, by far the most elaborate venture of its kind up to that date and an authority which remained standard for several generations, is permeated with an assumption that the growth of reason dries up the sources of imagination. The narrative is laid out on a conception of English literature as divided into three main ages, the archaic, the golden or Elizabethan, and the modern age of wit, toward which the Elizabethan declined.[2] This is a scheme which prevails in English literary history during the next half century, either in fairly literal repetitions, or in such modifications as that of Hazlitt in his *Lectures on the English Poets*, 1818, where he talks about the imagination of the Elizabethans, the fancy of the metaphysicals, the wit of the Restoration, the commonplaces of the 18th century.[3] In an earlier chapter [4] we have seen elaborate cyclic views joined with both primitivistic enthusiasm and anti-primitivistic satire in Shelley's *Defense* and in the *Four Ages* of his friend Peacock. Add to the Augustan phase of effete intellectualization a resurgence of poetry in the romantic era itself, and value this negatively as a pseudo-primitive relapse into barbarism, and we have the *Four Ages*. Value the romantic phase as a kind of promising spring-tide in cosmic legislation, and we have the historical conceptions underlying the *Defense*. Repetitions of the 18th-century pattern or protests against it appear in nearly all the English romantic essayists, in Coleridge, in De Quincey, in Carlyle.[5] At the same time, the romantic mind, both German and English, tended to reduce the phases of literary evolution to only two, a natural and an artificial, a romantic and a classical, conceived either as alternating without limit—a series of revolts against nature and of restorations—or as moving forward from the Homeric, directly natural or naive, in the irreversible dialectic of self-awareness or reflexive involution which we have noted in another earlier chapter.[6]

IV

Both in his *Observations on the Faerie Queene* and in his *History of English Poetry* Thomas Warton argues for the study of old, barbaric poetry mainly on the grounds that it records the "features" of a past

[2] Gray's scheme for a History of English Poetry, in a letter to Warton, 15 April, 1770 (first printed in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, February, 1783, pp. 100–1) gave Restoration and Augustan literature the name "school of France."

[3] See *Complete Works*, ed. P. P. Howe, VI (London, 1930), 83.

[4] Chapter 19.

[5] See René Wellek, "De Quincey's Status in the History of Ideas," *PQ*, XXIII (July, 1944), 264–5; "Carlyle and the Philosophy of History," *PQ*, XXIII (January, 1944), 63–4. Cf. Wellek, *Rise*, p. 193.

[6] Chapter 17.

time, "preserves the most picturesque and expressive representations of manners," "transmits to posterity genuine delineations of life." [7] During the romantic age the relation of literary study to historical antiquarianism becomes more complicated, participating in the Germanic conception that literature is the organic creation of a national mind, the expression of a certain society, age, and national spirit. Carlyle gives us the following vigorous formulation.

> The history of a nation's poetry is the essence of its history, political, scientific, religious. With all these the complete Historian of Poetry will be familiar: the national physiognomy, in its finest traits, and through its successive stages of growth, will be clear to him; he will discern the grand spiritual tendency of every period, which was the highest Aim and Enthusiasm of mankind in each, and how one epoch evolved in itself from the other. He has to record the highest aim of a nation, in its successive directions and developments; for by this the poetry of the nation modulates itself; this *is* the Poetry of the nation. Such were the primary essence of a true history of poetry.[8]

During the mid-19th century, French versions of this argument are the most prominent. They are less idealistic and patriotic than the earlier German versions, more sociological and deterministic. In what became the classic French instance with regard to England, Taine's *History of English Literature*, 1864, the aim of literary study is to uncover the environmental causes of literature—and these are conceived as falling under the now famous three main heads of *race*, *milieu*, and *moment*. That is, the study of literature is valuable because literature, even more than religion (which is a combination of poesy and credulity) and even more than philosophy (which is a mere dry abstraction from poetry) is the warmest and fullest revelation of the motives by which civilizations are determined. For the purpose of this study, poetry stands on the same level with all the other forms of direct human revelation, not only dramas and novels but letters, sermons, table talk, memoirs, "confessions." "The proper object of literature is to take note of sentiments." In fact literature cannot fail—it is rigorously determined—to take note of sentiments.

> And so for every kind of human production—for literature, music, the fine arts, philosophy, science, statecraft, industries,

[7] The phrases are taken from Warton's *History of English Poetry*, Preface, p. II. Cf. *Observations on the Faerie Queene*, 1762, Postscript, II, 323: "These compositions . . . preserve many curious historical facts, and throw considerable light on the nature of the feudal system. They are the pictures of ancient usages and customs; and represent the manners, genius, and character of our ancestors. . . ."

[8] *Essays* (Chapman and Hall edition, 1907), III, 225. Originally in the *Edinburgh Review*, vol. LIII (1831), no. 105, a review of William Taylor of Norwich's *Historic Survey of German Poetry*, 1831.

> and the rest. Each of these has for its direct cause a moral disposition, or a combination of moral dispositions: the cause given, they appear; the cause withdrawn, they vanish; the weakness or intensity of the cause measures their weakness or intensity. They are bound up with their causes, as a physical phenomenon with its condition, as the dew with the fall of the variable temperature, as dilatation with heat.[9]

V

THE drive toward literary history had begun during the 18th century in observations and speculations that were primarily evaluative—that is, they had to do with a re-assessment of neo-classic norms and a turning back to look at primitive literatures with what was considered a greater fairness. Such fairness having been established, and along with it an attitude of some unfairness toward the classic spirit which had once held sway, speculation continued, as we have seen, in the direction of historical rather than explicitly evaluative goals. The pursuit of literary studies along such lines could not, however, fail to have profound implications concerning literary value. Both the goals themselves and the more and more efficient historical techniques which were developed in their pursuit tended to establish such implications. The mere presence of historical research as a method of ever-increasing efficiency tended to promote exhibitions of its worth. Expensive tools have to be used.

The notion of a rigorously historical study of literature had, it is true, a long neo-classic and classic ancestry. Yet this kind of study flourished during the 19th century as never before. It will be sufficient for present aims merely to allude to the union of Bentleian and Wolffian classical philology with Scriptural hermeneutics under the leadership of Wilhelm von Humboldt and Schleiermacher, the further transfer of these methods to modern literature in the *Encyklopädie und Methodologie der Philologischen Wissenschaften* of August Böckh, the Indo-Germanic philological and folklore triumphs of the brothers Grimm, and somewhat later in France the resuscitation of the epic cycles and romances by such French scholars as Léon Gautier and Gaston de Paris. Here was the exalted situation of primitive epic (plausible enough outcome of such 18th-century efforts as those of Hurd) against which Matthew Arnold raised a classical voice in 1881. In our chapter on Arnold we have alluded already to the contrast between the classical and critical spirit of Arnold and the contemporary rise of the empirical linguistic studies which launched the *Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*. During the same era occurred the final purification of the Chaucerian canon by Bradley and Skeat, a work begun in the 18th-

[9] H. A. Taine, *History of English Literature*, trans. H. Van Laun (New York, 1886), Introduction, pp. 20, 18. Cf. esp. pp. 6–8, 10, 13–15.

century dawn by Tyrwhitt, and the multiplication of Shakespearian studies in every historical dimension. It is perhaps relevant to offer here the general observation that English literary scholarship tended to go against the grandiose generalizations, the dynamic aspirations, the sociological significance of the history writers in the German spirit. Resolute literary research avoided wider questions, suspended critical judgment, devoted all its energy to the accumulation of facts. The immediate value of these might be now and then difficult to see; still it would be rash to question their ultimate place in some construction of total learning.

The reversal of classical norms during the 18th century had meant not only a turning back to the primitive (as in itself a concept of value) but, as we have seen in Chapters 14 and 16, a new kind of respect for the original and genuine, and hence for the personal. Classical sophistication inevitably involved, or seemed to involve, a measure of "imitation" and artificiality. The really primitive, on the other hand, was necessarily a form of originality. And the really primitive could be discovered, in the last analysis, only by techniques of historical research. A certain wildness and abandon, a strength of color and emotion, might make out a *prima facie* case for the primitive. But the final test was scientific. Only scientific historical inquiry could justify an experience of pleasure in the emotion and the color.

The peculiar tone of 19th-century literary study, at least in England, would appear to result from a working union between two forces which one might offhand think of as quite disparate—the force of hard-headed, sceptical, factfinding, textual, bibliographical and biographical antiquarianism, and both augmenting this force and being augmented by it, the force of devotion to poetic genius, to the personality, originality, mind and emotion, virtues and vices, life, suffering and death of the literary creator. The concept of life and sufferings included all kinds of influences upon the creator, and hence no contradiction had to arise between personal study and more deterministic conceptions of national history, sociology, or politics. "Expression," as J. E. Spingarn has argued (with only a little exaggeration), was a motif common to all the forms of 19th-century theory. With the Germans and with their evangelists such as Mme. de Staël literature was an "expression of society." In the school of art for art's sake, from Victor Cousin on, "expression" in itself was the simple supreme law of art. In the variation given this philosophy by Sainte-Beuve and other men of letters, literature was the expression of personality. In the historical and deterministic critics deriving from Hegel, like Taine, literature was the expression of race, milieu, and moment. The "extreme impressionists," as Spingarn calls them, the later aesthetes like Pater and Wilde, thought of literature as the "exquisite expression of delicate and fluctuating sensations or impressions of life." [1]

[1] J. E. Spingarn, "The New Criticism," in *Criticism in America, Its Function and Status* (New York, 1924), pp. 19–20.

For all critics and theorists, literature was the expression of something. The norm of expression was the great co-ordinator, harmonizing the toughest and most scientific research techniques with the softest, most personal, and most emotive aesthetic interests.

VI

It is worth pointing out that the German romantic litterateurs, in their distinction between "classic" and "romantic" art, even Schiller in his germinal distinction between "naive" (direct and objective) classical art and "sentimental" (reflexive and subjective) romantic art, entertained no special reverence for authors themselves as persons to be consulted in the discrimination of one sort of art from another or even in the interpretation of the personal, sentimental, or romantic art. Thus Goethe in his *Conversations:*

> The Germans cannot cease to be Philistines. They are now squabbling about some verses, which are printed both in Schiller's works and mine, and fancy it is important to ascertain which really belong to Schiller and which to me; as if anything could be gained by such investigation—as if the existence of such things were not enough. . . . What matters the mine and thine? One must be a thorough Philistine, indeed, to attach the slightest importance to the solution of such questions.[2]

Literary critics of immediately succeeding generations, however (and one finds convincing examples both in France and in England), had no such scruples about the biographical application of the derivatively romantic theories to which they subscribed. Even Taine's vast schemes of cultural psychology were heavily grounded in a devotion to the individual, producing genius. The Introduction to his *History of English Literature* gets under way with the following nicely conceived imagistic strategy.

> What is your first remark on turning over the great, stiff leaves of a folio, the yellow sheets of a manuscript,—a poem, a code of laws, a declaration of faith? This, you say, was not created alone. It is but a mould, like a fossil shell, an imprint, like one of those shapes embossed in stone by an animal which lived and perished. Under the shell there was an animal, and behind the document there was a man. Why do you study the shell, except

[2] December 16, 1828. Cf. the complaint by Heine about the appeal to biographical information in reading his poetry and his sweeping rejection of the principle (*Correspondance*, I [Paris, 1867], 73 ff., June 10, 1823).

to represent to yourself the animal? So do you study the document only in order to know the man.[3]

And Sainte-Beuve, a critic moving along on the full tide both of the historical method and of the quasi-Kantian French movement of art for art's sake, exhibited in his numerous lectures and *causeries* the widest range of interest, understanding, and technique, but his most pronounced critical insight and most radical method, so far as he was a methodical critic, lay in the depth of his devotion to the personality of the author behind the work. The work existed mainly to provide him clues to the charting of that rich hinterland. No more deeply committed version of the biographical principle has perhaps ever been written than the following passage of his *Nouveaux lundis:*

> Literature, the literary product, is for me indistinguishable from the whole organization of the man. I can enjoy the work itself, but I find it difficult to judge this work without taking into account the man himself. I say without hesitation: *Like tree, like fruit.* Literary study thus brings me naturally to the study of morals.
>
> One has to ask oneself a certain number of questions about an author, and give answers to them (even though not out loud —and even though the questions may seem quite irrelevant to the nature of the works to be studied). Only after such questions can one be sure about the whole problem one faces. What did the author think about religion? In what way was he impressed by the contemplation of nature? How did he handle himself in the matter of women? How in the matter of money? Was he rich? Was he poor? What rules of living did he follow? What was his daily routine? And so on.—To sum it up: what was his master vice, his dominant weakness? Every man has one. Not a single one of the answers we give to these questions can be irrelevant to forming an opinion about the author of a book and about the book itself—that is, if we suppose we are dealing with something other than a treatise in pure geometry.[4]

[3] *History of English Literature*, trans. H. Van Laun (New York, 1886), Introduction, p. 1.

[4] *Nouveaux lundis* (Paris, 1865), III, 15, 28. The phrase *Like tree, like fruit* renders the French *tel arbre, tel fruit*, the inexplicit syntax of which is well suited to conveying the notion that here is something that will support Sainte-Beuve's line of argument. The Scriptural *arbor fructu cognoscitur*, which lies behind the French saying, points of course exactly in the opposite direction.

Sainte-Beuve wished to study an author in both his genealogy and his living family—in his father, his mother, his sisters and brothers, and even in his children (*Nouveaux lundis*, III, 18 ff.). He would study the author's childhood, his early environment, even the landscape in which he grew up. Taine, for instance, bore the impress of the gloomy Ardennes (*Nouveaux lundis*, VIII, 71).

From the mid-century in England we may take as a capital instance Browning's Introductory Essay to the Shelley letters published by Moxon in 1852. There are two kinds of poetry, wrote Browning, echoing faintly the utterances of the great Germans.[5] There is "objective" poetry, like that of Shakespeare, which does not depend on the personality of its author and does not require that we know anything about him. And there is "subjective" poetry, like that of Shelley, which is all compact of its author's personality and which takes on added richness and resonance with every iota of the author's personal record which we can discover. And so what extraordinarily good luck that these revelations of Shelley's mind have been preserved and are now made public!

> Such being the two kinds of artists [objective and subjective], it is naturally, as I have shown, with the biography of the subjective poet that we have the deeper concern. Apart from his recorded life altogether, we might fail to determine with satisfactory precision to what class his productions belong, and what amount of praise is assignable to the producer. . . . we must in every case betake ourselves to the review of a poet's life ere we determine some of the nicer questions concerning his poetry,—more especially if the performance we seek to estimate aright, has been obstructed and cut short of completion by circumstances,—a disastrous youth or a premature death. . . .
>
> The responsibility of presenting to the public a biography of Shelley, does not . . . lie with me: I have only to make it a little easier by arranging these few supplementary letters, with a recognition of the value of the whole collection. This value I take to consist in a most truthful conformity of the Correspondence, in its limited degree, with the moral and intellectual character of the writer as displayed in the highest manifestations of his genius.

One trouble with the argument, as all the world now knows, was that the supposed revelations of Shelley's mind were forgeries—throwing non-authentic light on Shelley's poems. Yet Browning we may suppose had his genuine access of pleasure and perhaps even an enhancement of insight into Shelley's art.[6] (There may well have been some insight,

[5] Cf. Meyer Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (New York, 1953), pp. 242–3, 375, n. 50, on the distinction between objective and subjective poetry as entertained by Friedrich Schlegel, Coleridge, De Quincey and others.

[6] See the statement of a recent editor: "The plain fact is that Browning wrote his essay as a foreword to a collection of spurious letters; but in this case the plain fact is less important than usual. Of the twenty-five letters in Moxon's publication of 1852, all but two were utter forgeries, pieced out with a few genuine phrases from Shelley's pen. . . . If here had been the only ground for the editor's enthusiasm, we

through whatever objective vision the forger himself enjoyed, and the forgeries to that extent were happy.) At any rate, Browning's venture was surely not to be written off as a failure in the cumulative history of romantic experience. One of the most scientific of Victorian philologists and one who was characteristically able to merge his science with a passion for the personal revelation, the distinguished Saxonist and Shakespearian F. J. Furnivall, makes, in an Introduction to the Browning Society reprint of the Introduction, published in 1881, the following boast of his own failure to be interested in Browning's poems:

> The interest [in Browning's Introductory Essay] lay in the fact, that Browning's "utterances" here are *his*, and not those of any one of the "so many imaginary persons" behind whom he insists on so often hiding himself, and whose necks I, for one, should continually like to wring, whose bodies I would fain kick out of the way, in order to get face to face with the poet himself, and hear his own voice speaking his own thoughts, man to man, soul to soul. Straight speaking, straight hitting, suit me best.[7]

The intense and precise labors of the Victorian philologists in the service of authenticity and other forms of factuality resulted in a great purification and straightening out of literary canons, and in large accesses of knowledge about the general education and reading habits of various authors. At the same time, the philologists were but moderately interested in the relation of their canonical and genetic discoveries to questions of evaluation and criticism. Furnivall and Hales, for instance, in their editing of the folio MS. from which Bishop Percy had taken his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* in 1765, pounced with much righteous scorn on the various prunings, normalizations, clarifications, and civilizations which Percy, not only an antiquarian but a critic, and faced with a real problem concerning the relation between antique fact and poetic value, had taken the liberty of imposing upon the old text. Furnivall and Hales performed their service of restoration and rehabilitation with unswerving rigor. It was an advantage to them not to be disturbed by any scruples about literary value such as had dis-

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might well be startled at its strength. But it is clear that Browning paid very little attention to the letters he was introducing to the world" (H. F. B. Brett-Smith, *Peacock's Four Ages of Poetry, Shelley's Defence of Poetry, Browning's Essay on Shelley*, Oxford, 1945, p. xxiv).

[7] *Browning Society Papers*, No. 1, London, 1881. A note to this passage contains the further curious confession: ". . . if a reader is thick-headed, or can't spare time to study and think a poem out, should not a poet give him a helping hand by a 'mediate word'?" Quoted by Alba Warren, pp. 112–13. Cf. Warren, p. 90, Carlyle's mistrust of the poetic medium, his view of Shakespeare's works as only a poor glimpse of the man himself—"windows" opening dimly upon him.

turbed the Bishop—or rather it was their advantage to enjoy a serene unification of scientific conscience with a belief that literary value was always and essentially identical with primitive authenticity. They were not coping with the question: Which of more than thirty versions of the ballad of *Sir Patrick Spens* is the most artistic? It would not have occurred to them to raise the question raised by a recent American scholar, whether Mrs. Brown of Falkland, Sir Walter Scott's informant about the text of ballads, may not have showed as much artistry in the recreative effort which went into her recording as had earlier recreators (to whom she had listened as a young woman) in their own efforts.[8]

In that heyday of scientific and conscientious recovery of the English literary past, problems could, however, become curiously complicated by the existence of such forged monuments to sincere imagination as the enthusiastic primitivism of the 18th century had produced. Here and there a stalwart taste, like that of Carlyle, J. S. Mill, or Herbert Spencer, might hold out for the Homeric grandeur of Ossian, but by and large the decline during the 19th century in the reputation of that remote bard kept pace with the growing obviousness that the Celtic magic was spurious. In another crucial instance, a special difficulty for arbitrating between fact and value arose because there was ample opportunity for comparing the forged language with that which philology could demonstrate to have actually prevailed in the literary era which was mimicked. Skeat's essay on the 15th-century English style which the ingenious Chatterton had scrambled together from 18th-century glossaries was one of the clearest triumphs a modern philology might win over the uncertainties which Warton, Ritson, and even Tyrwhitt had to some extent shared with the juvenile hoaxer. "The plan of the present edition," says Skeat, "will now be explained, and can be readily understood. Given the problem, how to edit the Rowley Poems to the most advantage? What must be the answer?" He was quite sure of this answer:

> To do away with the needless disguises, and, on the supposition of their [the poems'] not being genuine, to give them as far as possible in modern English.
>
> The reader now has a chance, *for the first time*, of judging what the poems are really like, without being continually pulled up, sometimes three times in a line, by hard words which no amount of acquaintance with early MSS. will enable him to solve. The process of thus re-writing the greater part of the poems has been rendered easier by frequently substituting Chatterton's

[8] Bertrand H. Bronson, "Mrs. Brown and the Ballad," *California Folklore Quarterly*, IV (April, 1945), 129–40.

> words in his *footnotes* for his words in the *text.* Thus, at p. 29, the second line in the original stands thus;
>
> Throwe halfe hys joornie, dyghte in *gites* of goulde;
>
> but Chatterton's footnote explains *gites* by *robes.* It is therefore quite justifiable to substitute *robes;* indeed, we really thus approximate more closely to the true original text, viz. to the text as first conceived in the poet's brain before it was translated into the Rowleian dialect.

It is important to understand that Skeat undertook this normalization of Chatterton's text not simply as a way of attaining philological truth (at any aesthetic cost) but actually as a way of getting at true aesthetic value—so closely were the notions of philological truth and aesthetic value united in his philosophy.

> What is the exact amount of merit to which Chatterton's genius attained, the reader can, in this edition, at last judge for himself. I only wish to say here that I have faithfully striven so to discharge my task as to protect the reader, on the one hand, from being misled by false old English, whilst endeavouring, on the other, to set forth Chatterton's thoughts to the best advantage. . . . That the public does not want *me* but *Chatterton,* is the fact I have endeavoured to keep steadily before me.[9]

Let us add one simple Chattertonian example to that which we have already supplied from Skeat's own Essay. The opening of Chatterton's *Bristowe Tragedie* reads:

> The feathered songster Chanticleer
> Han wound his bugle horn. . . .

Skeat duly corrects the second line to "Has wound his bugle horn" (without any advertisement of the fact) and so obliterates in the interest of grammar a part of whatever minor charm the tiny clarion of the line may have had.[1] Skeat's editing of Chatterton back to normal modern English is a turning of the knife in the wound; it accomplishes a kind of double forgery. The method carries out to the letter the

[9] W. W. Skeat, "Essay on the Rowley Poems," in *The Poetical Works of Thomas Chatterton,* ed. W. W. Skeat (London, 1872), II, xxxvii, xxxix, xlii. See the approving comment of Henry A. Beers, *A History of English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1899), p. 363. Skeat gets us "a little closer to the Rowley poems."

[1] For some 20th-century comments on Chatterton, written with a more Jabberwockian understanding of the relation between his faking and the exact nature of his poetic merit, see E. H. W. Meyerstein, *A Life of Thomas Chatterton* (New York, 1930), p. 176; Bertrand Bronson, "Thomas Chatterton," in *The Age of Johnson, Essays Presented to Chauncey Brewster Tinker* (New Haven, 1949), p. 246.

legitimate implications of the factual norm of authenticity and originality; but it has the disadvantage that it leaves "Chatterton the Marvellous Boy" with very little explanation of where he stands in the history of English poetic achievement.[2]

Near the end of a long career as translator and popularizer of classical epic and as custodian of native balladry, Andrew Lang wrote a book on the vexed question about the authenticity of the *Border Minstrelsy* which Sir Walter Scott had assembled from such authorities as Mrs. Brown of Falkland and James Hogg the Ettrick Shepherd. And what of Sir Walter's own role as a ballad maker? Of one thing Lang was sure.

> If it [*Auld Maitland*] is a bad ballad, such as many people could compose, then it is not by Sir Walter.[3]

In short, authorship guaranteed quality, and by a legitimate manipulation of the hypothetical syllogism implied, quality was at least a necessary condition for the imputation of authorship. So far as this was a focus on the literary work itself, rather than on external types of information about it, the argument might find its classical analogues. "I wouldn't believe Cicero had written this way," said Bentley, "even if Cicero himself should swear he had."[4] Cicero might have dreamed he had written that way, or he might simply not have remembered not having done so. So far as the emphasis is on the means of establishing who wrote something, the preference in a given case for internal over external evidence is neither peculiarly classical nor peculiarly post-romantic.[5] But it will be noticed that Bentley's statement is a greater hyperbole; it contemplates the extreme of discountenancing the very testimony of the author himself about his own writing. The basic supposition on which Lang and his generation were working was the opposite. Clear, irrefutable external testimony that Sir Walter was the author of a ballad would have elicited from Lang the admission that it

[2] On the genetic side, R. D. Havens, "Assumed Personality, Insanity and Poetry," *RES*, N.S. IV (1953), 26–37, discusses the resemblance of forger's mask to Bedlam retreat in releasing such 18th-century poets as Chatterton, Macpherson, and Smart from the inhibitions of the neo-classical poetic conscience.

[3] Andrew Lang, *Sir Walter Scott and the Border Minstrelsy* (London, 1910), p. vi.

[4] The question at issue was whether the name of Hermagoras in Latin should end in *as* or *a*. Quintilian quotes Cicero as using *a*. But: "*Repone hic paulisper, Hermagora inventor, & Hermagora habuisset; non sentis vocalium concursum vaste hiantem? Ego vero Ciceronem ita scripsisse ne Ciceroni quidem affirmanti crediderim*" (Richard Bentley, *Epistola ad . . . Millium*, 1691, quoted in part in footnote to Alexander Pope's *Dunciad* IV, 222). Cf. Bentley's *Emendationes in Menandri Reliquias* (Cambridge, 1713), p. [70].

[5] Cf. Thomas Warton's insistence on the internal and aesthetic evidence against the authenticity of the Rowley poems (*An Enquiry into the Authenticity of the Poems Attributed to Thomas Rowley*, London, 1782, p. 90).

was a good ballad. Criticism would be merely the finding of praise in support of the poetic value necessarily entailed by authenticity.

VII

DURING the latter part of the 19th century, the aesthetic movement which we have considered in Chapter 22 took a contemplative, static view of individual art works and so was anti-historical. Also anti-historical was the kind of non-dialectical Hegelian idealism which appeared at Oxford in A. C. Bradley's appreciation of Shakespearian tragedy and in the essays of W. P. Ker.[6] We have observed already that the more ambitiously systematic kind of literary history writing never enjoyed a real vogue in England. Still a modest tradition may be traced during the latter half of the century in works of Leslie Stephen, John Morley, and even so aesthetically removed a litterateur as Walter Pater.[7] This reached its climax and conclusion in W. J. Courthope's great *History of English Poetry*, published from 1895 to 1910. Courthope, reciting the history of the national imagination in close relation to political institutions, conceives a long dialectical conflict between individualism and collectivism—(the collective Middle Ages had been bad for literature, the harmoniously adjusted Renaissance very good, and the romantically individual modern time bad again). He was a master of the long vista into intellectual history.

The decades immediately following Courthope's *History* saw much activity in the simpler chronicle forms of English literary history (in this period the encyclopedic *Cambridge History of English Literature* was begun and completed), but at the same time there was a decline in speculative history-writing and in a theoretical concern for literary history.[8] The movement of art for art's sake, especially as it affected the criticism of such litterateurs as Gosse, Saintsbury, Raleigh, Quiller-Couch, or Garrod, led away both from history and from criticism to the creed of enthusiastic appreciation and in historical effort to the supposedly literal fidelity of the "photographer's plate."[9] A sceptical attitude toward scholarship became fashionable in England early in the

[6] Notably that on the "Philosophy of Art" in the Hegelian manifesto *Essays in Philosophical Criticism*, 1883, reprinted in Ker's *Collected Essays* (London, 1925), II, 231–68.

[7] See Stephen's *History of Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, 1876; Morley's *Studies in Literature*, 1891; Pater's *Plato and Platonism*, 1893. Literature, said Stephen, is the "noise of the wheels of history" (Frederick W. Maitland, *The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen*, London, 1906, pp. 283–4).

[8] Just at the moment when general cultural history was spreading out into wider and wider cyclic panoramas—as in the works of Spengler and Toynbee.

[9] G. E. B. Saintsbury, *History of English Criticism* (Edinburgh, 1911), pp. 499, 521.

20th century and discouraged all but the less reflective kinds of antiquarianism and the whimsical essay in the "art of praise." Within the field of critical writing in English, it has remained indeed for American scholarship during the 20th century to carry some of the anti-critical trends which we are about to describe to their most systematic extremes.

In America during even the first decades of the 20th century, academic literary criticism was less warmly colored by romantic personalism and the art of praising. Although a Bliss Perry, a William Lyon Phelps, and later a Henry Seidel Canby did appear and flourish, American literary study was much more inclined than the British to borrow rigors from the methods of German philology and in general to undertake a respectful emulation of feats being performed in the laboratories of physical science. The literary scientist tried to set up the rules of his experimental procedure with sober and neutral precision. Consider, for instance, Professor L. A. Sherman of the University of Nebraska. In a series of notes appearing in the periodical *Science* during 1889, he read that conclusions about the average number of words per sentence used by a given author should not be based on a sampling of fewer than many thousands of sentences. Inspired by this conception, he counted the number of words per sentence for all five volumes of Macaulay's *History of England* and demonstrated a "consistent numerical . . . average," of 23.43 words per sentence.

> Here, then, in this 23.43 was the resultant of the forces which had made Macaulay's literary character.[1]

In 1876 the Johns Hopkins University had been founded expressly for the purpose of introducing upon the American scene the graduate seminar on the German model. In 1883 was organized the Modern Language Association of America, which in 1927 voted to change the original definition of its purpose, "the study of modern languages and literature," to a phrasing more consonant with what had long before become its actually dominant purpose, the "advancement of research in the modern languages and literatures." (It was only in 1950 that the members of the Association voted to add to their constitutional statement of purpose the word "criticism.") A new era of American literary studies was carried in triumphantly by a massive conflux of motives which might be named separately as (1) respect for German philology, (2) a native American desire for facts and scientific precision, (3) a social and moral readiness to fall in with the critical relativism invited by the study of literature in its causes and origins, (4) a growing democratic require-

[1] L. A. Sherman, "On Certain Facts and Principles in the Development of Form in Literature," *The University Studies of the University of Nebraska*, I (July, 1892), 350–3.

ment of mass production in the qualification of scholar-teachers, and (5) on the side of the warmer emotions a romantic nostalgia for the European past and the Middle Ages. The rigors of scientific antiquarianism were, as we have already suggested, far from incompatible with certain kinds of sentimentalism—both the personal devotions and gossip of biographical research and the various nationalistic limitations of view, the provincial specializations, which by the end of the 19th century had grown out of the romantic German stress on origins and the evaluation of literature as national or racial physiognomy.[2]

Great things were to be expected in America of the newly imported method, the dawn of a new intellectual life. The aspect of joy and celebration, of pioneer triumph, which came with the arrival of the new disciplines may be illustrated from the presidential address delivered by Professor Thomas R. Price of Columbia before the Annual Meeting of the Modern Language Association in 1901:

> . . . we must all feel a certain warmth and exhilaration. With that period of forty years . . . there has been a steady current of progress. . . . There has been, indeed, in this wide enthusiasm for the spreading and elevation of modern language instruction, an intellectual movement that may fairly be compared with the enthusiasm in the days of the Renaissance. . . . In country villages I found the same ardor for our special studies as in great universities. No man that has shared in this movement can fail to feel a noble joy.[3]

American literary scholars were on the whole more favorably impressed than were the British by deterministic and social thinking about literature along the lines that had been laid down by German and French historians, notably by Taine. The name of Taine and that of Brunetière (who had complicated and partly countered the deterministic view by adding to it the idea of the Darwinian evolution of literary genres)[4] were commonplaces of American journalistic criticism around the turn of the century.[5] In a more routine way, without reference to Taine or to other foreign authorities, and with only a more or less complete understanding of what went on, American literary research found wide scope in exercises relating literature to various kinds of influence—social, political, economic, climatic, national, regional, traditional, psychological, and genealogical—all that might be fitted under the most

[2] See René Wellek, "Literary Scholarship," in *American Scholarship in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Merle Curti (Harvard University Press, 1953), esp. pp. 111–17.

[3] *PMLA*, XVI (1901), 77–91, quoted by Wellek, *loc. cit.*, p. 112.

[4] See especially his *L'Evolution des genres dans l'histoire de la littérature*, 1890, and *Manuel de l'histoire de la littérature française*, 1897.

[5] See W. V. O'Connor, *An Age of Criticism 1900–1950* (Chicago, 1952), pp. 4–6, 51–3.

inclusive and most durable of Taine's three headings, the term "milieu." [6]

Let us attempt a brief retrospective statement which will locate the present topic in relation to that of the socio-real in literature which we have already discussed in Chapter 21. The ground of relation is the concept of science in literature. Two divisions of the concept may be distinguished, the creative and the historico-critical: 19th-century science as the religion of reason sponsored an advance from the realism of Flaubert to the highly theorized and self-conscious naturalism of Zola and Frank Norris (literature scientifically faithful to life), and at the same time another advance from the historical principles of literary study laid down by Taine to the literary evolutionism of Brunetière and then to the more generalized and readily available doctrine that literary criticism should be neutral and tolerant and should devote itself to discovering the natural forces by which literature is caused. There were easy enough connections between neutral determinism and sociological interests, and hence between historical science and certain new forms of didacticism. American literary scholarship during the 1920's and 1930's moved along lines that led quite smoothly into companionship with the proletarian criticism that flourished during the second of those decades. The case for literature as class propaganda and social criticism seemed very obvious. The academically established techniques stood clearly ready to support it. The association between the names of New England college professors and organs of doctrinaire liberal opinion like *The New Republic* became a normal phenomenon.

VIII

But the course of literary scholarship during the past twenty-five years both in America and in England has been remarkable for the variety and mixture of its historical and historico-critical drives. One of the most complicated contributions during this period from the historical side has been an American version of *Geistesgeschichte*,[7] the new school of the History of Ideas, initiated by Professor A. O. Lovejoy and represented in his numerous essays and in the *Journal of the History of Ideas* which he founded in 1940. (An earlier journal founded also [1933] by Hopkins professors, *ELH, A Journal of English Literary History*, has aspired to make a much more specifically literary application of historical principles.) Professor Lovejoy and his colleagues

[6] See Edmund Wilson's essay "The Historical Interpretation of Literature," in *The Intent of the Critic*, ed. Donald Stauffer (Princeton, 1941).

[7] Wellek, *loc. cit.*, p. 119 points out that the form of *Geistesgeschichte* cultivated in Germany during recent decades was a reaction against positivistic philology. Among the few direct echoes of that movement in America was the hostile *Academic Illusions*, 1933, by Martin Schütze.

have quite openly confessed to being interested in literature only as it is a document of intellectual history, a "dilution" of "philosophical ideas." [8] These historians may be looked upon as frankly dismissing the discussion of literary values and hence as not being in aggressive conflict with that discussion. The technique of the History of Ideas when picked up by literary scholars themselves, however, has produced some new versions of the problems that were posed in their essentials during the 18th century by writers like Warton and Hurd. The history of ideas has turned out to have a special kind of affinity for literary criticism—the reason for this lying not in the emphasis of the discipline on history, but in its emphasis on ideas. Despite the atomistic treatment of "unit" ideas, like slogans or catchwords, which is a first principle of the school, ideas as such do tend to have implications and to be related in systems. It would be difficult, for instance, to expound Pope's *Essay on Man* in the light of Professor Lovejoy's essays on nature, deism, and classicism without implying something about the organization of ideas in the poem itself and hence about its unity and coherence. Much more than the classic types of textual, bibliographical, biographical and source study, the new reduction of "ideas" to historical study has tended to approach the contestable border lines where historical study and literary evaluation interact and must be reconciled. For ideas constitute the more universal and durable meaning of words—meaning as differentiated from momentary suggestion and from the mere denotation of local date, place, and other fact. Ideas are hence lexicography, the history of the meanings which inform and vitalize the poet's medium, his vocabulary. History of Ideas, if it has not created any critical problem which is on principle different from that created by Hurd's desire to re-appraise Gothic manners, has at least subtilized and universalized the problem.

But in the history of ideas, *whose* ideas are of most importance? The historical problem has been made somewhat more difficult in recent years not only by a growing interest in the history of poetic interpretation but by the emergence of a newly emphasized doctrine that the duty of the literary critic is to look only to the initial moment in any given history. A verbal expression will change in time, perhaps it will improve—but *illegitimately*. What a reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement* called "an uncomfortably strict rectitude," a very pure attitude of reverence toward the historic moment at which the poet wrote and his first readers read, was illustrated vivaciously in the British critic Geoffrey Tillotson's *Essays in Criticism and Research*, 1942. "To read later emotions here and there into a poem," argued Professor Tillotson, "is a tedious error in criticism and worthy only of the insipidly fickle florilegist."

[8] *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), p. 17.

> The original meaning of a word in a great poem is the only one worth attending to. However delightful the meaning arising out of new verbal connotations, such meaning is irrelevant to the author's poem. He must stand by his poem as he meant it. . . . When Lady Anne Winchelsea wrote
>
> Nor will in fading silks compose
> Faintly the inimitable rose,
>
> she meant that she disliked the common feminine pastime of embroidery since it can produce only a poor 'imitation' of an actual rose. But following on after the romantic poets and all the talk about pure poetry, those lines have accidentally taken on a beauty which did not exist for their author.[9]

Perhaps so. The wider implications of the argument, its actual stress on history in some public sense rather than on the author romantically *per se*, were more fully brought out only a few years ago by the British critic and historian F. W. Bateson of Oxford. Following up the success of an earlier inquiry into the linguistic determinations of literature (*English Poetry and the English Language*, 1934), this critic accomplishes a reversal of the usual bent of historical studies toward origins.[1] He is willing to think that the author himself and his inspirations can be related to the produced poem only somewhat dubiously and irrelevantly. Not so the audience for whom the author produced the poem and on whom it made its first impact. Here is a more objectively solid point of reference. Studies in literary reputation had appeared before this, and more than a little scattered attention had been paid to such first-hand evidence as that provided by the diaries and letters of novel readers and theater goers (Simon Forman in the day of Shakespeare, Samuel Pepys in the Restoration, Boswell, Fanny Burney, Horace Walpole, and all the memorialists and letter-writers of the 18th and 19th centuries). Bateson, however, has undertaken to manipulate such material into a distinct theoretical dimension. He offers us the proposition—fairly novel in its clarity—that the validity of the literary work is to be decided exactly by its measure of conformity to the understanding of some historically specific audience. Within a given age there will be not one audience but a number of audiences—according to class, sex, coterie, profession—and hence a number of possible frames of reference. Only one of these, however, will be right. The essential function of poetry is "the expression in language of the sense of social solidarity." And Bateson believes, "on the evidence of the poetry," that "at any one

[9] *Essays in Criticism and Research* (Cambridge, at the University Press, 1942), pp. xx–xxi. Cf. *TLS*, April 4, 1942, p. 174.

[1] F. W. Bateson, *English Poetry: A Critical Introduction* (London, 1950), pp. 69 ff.

period" there was "only one social group in England that was functioning healthily." If we modern readers want to understand a poem of the past, "we need to be able to identify ourselves as far as possible with its original readers, the poet's contemporaries, whose ideal response to the poem in fact constitutes its meaning." Here is milieu and moment with a sharply new twist.

Perhaps Bateson's argument offers as convenient a provocation as any for concluding our narrative of the historical method with some hint of the dissatisfaction which it may entail for the critic even in its most recent and subtle versions. A critic is a person who habitually finds himself puzzled to know on what grounds (the poem itself? or some testimony outside the poem?) he is expected to divine what are sometimes referred to as a poet's intentions. And in this matter Bateson is apparently at one with the critic. But may not a critic find himself equally puzzled to know on what grounds (poem or something outside the poem) he is expected to identify the readers the poet *intended* to address? Or how is the critic to decide who were the elite or "most intelligent" among the poet's actual first readers? And were these elite the poet's actual best readers? What of Dr. Johnson's response to the poetry of Gray? What of Milton's readers before Dryden's and Addison's criticism? What of the contemporary readers whom Gerard Manley Hopkins almost entirely lacked and did not seek? What of most readers of Eliot's *Waste Land* in 1922? Let the present writers be content to say here that they believe a critic ought to have in mind not just any response of a contemporary reader, or the average response, or even the response of any elite group, but in a more generally human sense an "ideal response." And in this of course we refuse the question, taking the onus off the shoulders of any empirically identifiable audience and placing it on the "meaning" of the poem itself.[2]

The American Professor Lionel Trilling's essay entitled "The Sense of the Past," as it is one of the latest, appears to us also one of the most delicate complications of the historical problem. "To suppose that we can think like men of another time," says Professor Trilling, "is as much an illusion as to suppose that we can think in a wholly different way." (As if points of view could be put in and out of our minds like lantern slides—and opaque ones at that.) Yet certain difficulties do attend upon our making the ideas of the past transparent for our own uses. "In cer-

[2] The view suggested here does not of course attempt to discountenance a dramatically conceived audience as reflected in the poem itself or in its tone—Marvell's coy mistress, Donne's metaphoric antagonist Death, Shelley's West Wind, or the audience of young ladies and their polite gentlemen admirers to whom Pope's *Rape of the Lock* (as distinguished, say, from his *Dunciad*) is immediately addressed. The critical reader of poetry, and especially the reader of a later age, constantly reads over the shoulder of a dramatic reader who is as much a fiction as the story of the poem or any of its rhetoric.

tain cultures," says Professor Trilling (and these include obviously our own), "the pastness of a work of art gives it an extra-aesthetic authority which is incorporated into its aesthetic power."

> Wordsworth's Immortality Ode is acceptable to us only when it is understood to have been written at a certain past moment; if it had appeared much later than it did, if it were offered to us now as a contemporary work, we would not admire it.[3]

Here it may be well to note the resemblance of the argument to that at which we arrived in concluding an earlier chapter,[4] on the technical problem of "poetic diction." Eliot's statement about the futility of repeating poetic achievements or Gertrude Stein's about the vital force of contemporaneity might as well appear in the present context as in the earlier. And so might the young joker who typed out some of Shakespeare's less well-known sonnets and submitted them to a New York press, with the result which need not be repeated here. Professor Trilling argues that a certain quality of pastness enters into some works of art with the lapse of time and becomes part of what we enjoy in them. But he seems to argue too—and this may be a somewhat different argument—that we excuse or accept certain masterpieces only because we know they were written in the past—as if we made allowances for the author's deficiency of scientific knowledge or social vision. Perhaps the truth is that we should find it so odd if a poet wrote in certain ways today that we could not help suspecting the poem somehow of being false. That is, any old-fashioned masterpieces that failed to get written in their own day will now never get written. And if they had been written, they would to some extent have changed the poetic tradition and hence would have changed the situation from which the modern poet must write. But none of these unquestionable facts about the genesis of poetry will quite justify the conclusion (which Professor Trilling in fact does avoid) that old masterpieces are to be taken only on tolerance, or that the only poems which are actually good reading today are contemporaneous ones. There is a passage in the *Practical Criticism* of I. A. Richards in which he argues that the date when a poem was written "cannot by itself settle its genuineness, in the sense of its sincerity." But it is good "presumptive evidence." A poet may well enough "write an entirely sincere poem in the manner of a different age, but on the whole the probability is strongly against it."[5] To the

[3] Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination, Essays on Literature and Society* (New York, 1953), pp. 182, 183, 184.

[4] Chapter 16.

[5] *Practical Criticism* (New York; 1935), p. 77. "It is impossible," writes Victoria Sackville West, "to imagine, even after allowing for changes of diction, a Gray's 'Elegy,' or an 'Ode on Intimations of Immortality,' still less a 'Prelude,' or a 'Paradise

ambiguous sense of the word "sincerity" in this passage—sincerity as warmness and innocence of purpose? sincerity as poetic power and achievement?—let us add a third shade of meaning (legitimate by historical and deterministic canons), sincerity as the poet's being in rapport with his age, and we have a tabloid of the whole ambiguously conceived ground which history and criticism are accustomed to dispute.

SUPPLEMENT

On examination mornings, he [Péguy] would ask the student next to him to wake him up in thirty minutes, after he had read the theme of the composition to be handed in. Then he would go to sleep as soundly as a child and upon being awakened would immediately set to work; and exactly on the dot, he turned in a flawless paper which almost always got the highest grade. There was never the slightest mistake in what he wrote and never a correction. Péguy did not believe it was right to make corrections. Whatever went through his mind in connection with the subject was immediately couched in that straightforward style which was already so convincing. Why, he thought, should he turn down a word or a group of words that had come to him as he wrote. They had a right to stand with all the other words on the page. They expressed something in him. He wasn't going to betray them by pretending that they never had been in his mind.

Péguy . . . wrote regularly, but he never knew what he was going to write when he sat down to his sheet of white paper. . . . Not a word was ever scratched out. If a word came to him, he argued, it had as much right to be written down as all its fellow-words in the book. It was there as a witness, like a pebble on the long road he travelled. Péguy considered that what he wrote had been dictated to him. When he wanted to praise a book, or a sentence in a book, he never said: 'It is good,' he said: 'It is dictated.'—Julian Green, Introduction to Charles Péguy, *Basic Verities, Prose and Poetry* (New York, 1943), pp. 17, 30, by permission of Pantheon Books, Inc.

The players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare, that in his writing, (whatsoever he penn'd) hee never blotted out line. My answer hath beene, would he had blotted a thousand. Which they thought a malevolent speech. I had not told posterity this, but for their ignorance who choose that circumstance to commend their friend by, wherein he most faulted.—Ben Jonson, *Timber: or, Discoveries* (1641)

Lost,' as the product of the twentieth century. . . . I do not believe that even a great poet, were one to arise, could or would move upon the place or breathe the air of Milton and Wordsworth. This is simply another way of saying that sublimity has gone out of fashion" (*Tendencies of Modern English Poetry*, quoted by H. W. Garrod, *Poetry and the Criticism of Life*, Cambridge, Mass., 1931, p. 13).

Rare Monkish Manuscripts for Hearne alone,
And Books for MEAD, and Rarities for Sloane.

—Alexander Pope, *Epistle to Burlington* (1731), ll. 9–10

Rarities! how could'st thou be so silly as not to be particular in the Raritys of *Sloane* as in those of the other five Persons? What knowledge, what Meaning, is conveyed in the Word *Raritys!* Are not some Drawings, some Statues, some Coins, all monkish Manuscripts, and some Books, *Raritys?* Could'st thou not find a Trisyllable to express some Parts of Nature for a Collection of which that learned and worthy Physician is eminent? Fy, fy; correct and write . . . *Butterflys for* SLOANE. *Sir Hans Sloane* is known to have the finest Collection of Butterflys in *England*, and perhaps in the World.

—Thomas Cooke, *The Comedian*, no. 2, May, 1732, p. 15 [Thomas Cooke was saluted by Pope in the *Epistle to Arbuthnot*, in *Dunciad* II, and in *Peri Bathous*.]

Rare Monkish Manuscripts for Hearne alone,
And Books for MEAD, and Butterflies for Sloane.

—Alexander Pope, *Epistle to Burlington* (1744), ll. 9–10

"Chamier once asked him," said Johnson, "what he meant by *slow*, the last word in the first line of *The Traveller:*

'Remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow.'

Did he mean tardiness of locomotion? Goldsmith, who would say something without consideration, answered 'Yes.' I was sitting by, and said, 'No, Sir; you do not mean tardiness of locomotion; you mean that sluggishness of mind which comes upon a man in solitude.' Chamier believed then that I had written the line as much as if he had seen me write it."

—James Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson*, 9 April, 1778

An editor of Goldsmith's poems, Austin Dobson, adds the remark: "It is quite possible, however, that Goldsmith meant no more than he said."

—*Poetical Works of Goldsmith*, Oxford, 1939, p. 167

Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1751) has been criticized adversely for being too personal a revelation of the poet's feelings about himself, especially in the Epitaph with which the poem concludes. On the other hand, the poem has been defended against this criticism by the following three lines of argument: (1) that the Epitaph represents Gray's feelings not about himself but about his close friend Richard West, who died in 1742; (2) that the Epitaph actually does not refer to Gray at all or to his friend, but, as may be seen if one reads the poem closely, to a rustic stonecutter and epitaphic poet, addressed as "Thee" in stanza 24; (3) that the "me"

of the first stanza, the "Thee" of stanza 24, and the Epitaph are all to be read, not in the traditional way, as representing Gray the man who is known in his letters to Walpole and other biographical documents, but in a more detached way, as representing a generalized *persona*, the anonymous poet who is the speaker of the poem. (For further light on these arguments, see Frank Ellis, "Gray's *Elegy:* the Biographical Problem in Literary Criticism," *PMLA*, LXVI, December, 1951, 971–1008.)

This problem in practical criticism is a trim realization of certain 18th- and 19th-century trends in theory about poems and poets. The second line of argument (2), a recent invention by Mr. Ellis, introduces a new degree of complication to the "diagonal" shift described in Chapter 6 apropos of Longinus.

. . .

It is not defence of the personalist drift, but explanation, that is needed. The personalist deviation is here to stay, not only in programme notes but in serious discussions of literature which, apparently unaffected by recent critical trends, continue to pour from the presses. For some it may be a racking experience to own that the personalist approach is still established as the dominant approach in most classrooms. But there it is, all the same.

However objectionable, the personalist approach manifests a persistency that itself clamours for explanation. If the urn really is the issue, why is it always in peril of being overlooked or tossed aside? If you so much as whisper that there is a jinnee in the urn, most onlookers will be only too willing to drop the urn without further ado. Broken, it will let the jinnee out, and they can ask him a few questions. While decrying the tendency to behave this way, we may be excused for asking what accounts for the presence of the tendency in the first place.

Man's deepest orientation is personal.

The assertion that in works of art it is the object itself which counts thus treads such crucial ground that it must be made with great honesty, which means with circumspection and humility. Not only the truth of the situation, but its awkwardness as well, must be faced. This awkwardness derives from the fact that, far fetched as it may seem when applied to less important works of art, the principle apparently holds that, in a valid but not exclusive sense, each work of art is not only an object but a kind of surrogate for a person. Anything that bids for attention in an act of contemplation is a surrogate for a person. In proportion as the work of art is capable of being taken in full seriousness, it moves further and further along an asymptote to the curve of personality.

—Walter J. Ong, "The Jinnee in the Well-Wrought Urn," *Essays in Criticism*, IV (July, 1954), 311, 315, 319, by permission of the editor.